

THE ROYAL MONASTERY OF
SAN LORENZO AT EL ESCORIAL

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THE IDEA OF THE PRUDENT KING

*“Prudent founder, well did you employ
Your very great prudence;
For you made your House eternal
with the everlasting House you founded.”*

(F. de Morata, 1664)

In his well-known *Dichos y hechos del rey D. Felipe II* (1632), Baltasar Porreño wrote that the monarch had built a temple at El Escorial “which alongside the seven wonders of the world is one of them and merits first place”. In other words, very early on the great work rivalled the great architecture of Antiquity as the eighth wonder, for Porreño’s wishes notwithstanding this was the place that fell to it. Others were more uncompromising. Father Francisco de los Santos for example in his *Descripción breve del Monasterio de San Lorenzo* (1657) had no hesitation in cutting short the argument by describing the work of Philip II as *Opus miraculum orbis* and *the only wonder of the world*, thus ruling out all others. This means that in the view of both contemporaries and later generations, one had to go right back in history to find, in the Pyramids of Egypt or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, anything to compare with the stunning grandeur of the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

These are the sentiments expressed by one of the most important chroniclers of the great Philippine foundation, Father Sigüenza, author of the *Historia de la Orden de San Gerónimo* (1605) and a direct witness of everything that happened while it was actual-

ly being built, so he will often be quoted in this book: “So I seek, therefore, in the last book of this history, to show the truth and proof of this, giving full news of the illustrious fabric of the monastery of San Lorenzo el Real, which, without offence to any other, I shall make so bold as to say is one of the best understood and considered that has been seen in many centuries, and we can set it alongside the most beautiful of the ancient ones, and so similar to them, that they seem to have been born from one and the same idea. In grandeur and majesty it surpasses all those we are now acquainted with...”

This extraordinary achievement had a principal author, King Philip II, who in a short time skilfully completed the colossal building venture of the monastery complex of El Escorial. His name was thus added to the list of those kings and emperors who like Solomon or Justinian had left a mark on history with their civic achievements of a religious nature, in which they not only acted as royal patrons but also personally assumed the sacred destiny of their architectures. The figure of the *Rex-Sacerdos* in fact brings together these and other names, in which the action of the temporal government is identified with the service of the cause of the Almighty God. So, in a curious historical rival-

ry, if the words of Justinian at the consecration of Santa Sofia in Constantinople are true, when viewing the extraordinary space beneath the dome he said “Solomon I’ve beaten you”, referring to the temple of Jerusalem, something similar may have passed through Philip II’s mind when the last stone of the monastery was set in place, on 13 September 1584.

Twenty-one years had passed since the work had started and some important areas like the Royal Pantheon still remained to be completed, but the complex was finished and was able to fulfil the various aims the King had set after prolonged meditation on the actual purpose of the foundation. These are stipulated in the Foundational Charter the Monastery of El Escorial and should be known, at least in their most significant features, to appreciate how ambitious and precise the King’s project was.

Indeed, one of the keys to an understanding of El Escorial lies in the Foundational Charter, signed on 22 April 1567, in which definite form is given to the royal will, which had in fact already been revealed: “in recognition of the victory that Our Lord was pleased to give me on the day of St. Laurence [San Lorenzo] in the year 1557, I have determined to build and fit out a monastery, where continual thanks will be given for it [the victory], and sacrifices and prayers for the souls of the Emperor and Empress, my parents, may they have sacred glory, and mine.” This is what the King wrote, in 1561, thus advancing his intentions to the General of the Hieronymite Order, to whom he was to give the future monastery.

The Foundational Charter was written when the work had already begun. After invoking the Holy Trinity and the Virgin Mary and mentioning the titles of the monarch, according to the protocolary formula, the text says: “In gratitude for the many great benefits We have received and receive daily from our Lord and because he has guided Us in Our actions in his holy service and has preserved Our empires in his holy faith and in the religion established by him... being mindful of how much it is pleasing to God, and what an appropriate token of gratitude for the benefits obtained

it is to build churches and monasteries where his holy name may be praised and glorified and where his holy faith is safeguarded and revived with the teaching and example of the monks as servants of God; so that prayers may be made to Our Lord God by Ourselves, Our royal ancestors and successors, for the salvation of Our souls... knowing and appreciating that the emperor and the king, Our father and lord, after giving over his kingdoms to us, charged Us... according to his last will, to take charge of his final dwelling place and of the empress our mother and lady, and being mindful of the expedience of giving most worthy burial to their bodies and that offerings should be made for them perpetually and that their memory be celebrated; and because We have decided to be buried in the same place as they... In virtue of these considerations We found and build the monastery of San Lorenzo el Real in the town of El Escorial in the diocese of Toledo, which We found and build in honour of and in the name of the blessed San Lorenzo in virtue of our special veneration for this glorious saint and in recollection of the favours and victories that we began to obtain from Our Lord on his feast day. We give it to the order of St. Hieronymus in virtue of the profound love and devotion which We, like the Emperor and king, Our Lord, give him. We have decided, furthermore, to found a school in which the sciences of the spirit and sacred theology will be taught, and a seminary where children may be educated and taught the Christian faith, good habits and to lead a pious life, as well as a hospital, according to the conditions that accompany this document...”

These conditions detail various aspects which we shall discuss in these pages. They reaffirm the nature of the foundation to which Philip II returns on subsequent occasions, in his desire to improve the initial idea. Thus, in a series of Royal Documents but above all in his will (1594), the monarch, just like the artist in an unceasing quest for perfection, introduces variants in the organisation of the monastery, in particular with regard to liturgical functions, all aimed at allaying a personal qualm fluctuating between the fear

of God and respect for death as the inescapable transit to eternal life. This is made evident in the codicil to his will of 1598 when, some days before his death and after having laid down for such an event more than sixty thousand masses, he adds that “Two monks shall pray without interruption before the most holy sacrament of the altar for the soul of the founder...”.

While this speaks eloquently of the ultimate purpose of the monastery, it is helpful to summarise the other aims which made the venture possible. First, it should be stressed how in the Foundational Charter the monarch is shown as being chosen and protected by God in a reciprocal relationship of divine protection-defense of the faith, just as was expected of the Catholic King in the spirit of Trent. Second, continuing the medieval secular custom of founding and fitting out a monastery, Philip II places his trust in a monastic order, in this case the Hieronymites so closely linked to his father in the retreat of Yuste, to ensure praise of God and the preservation of the faith. Third, this initiative was an interested one, for, just as the monarchs of Castile and Aragon had done in the past with foundations such as the Cistercian abbeys of Las Huelgas de Burgos and Poblet, amongst many others, Philip II sought above all a suitable place for a royal pantheon. In this respect in the Foundational Charter the monarch recalls the last wish of his father, the Emperor Charles V, to give a worthy resting place for his mortal remains together with those of the Empress Isabella of Portugal, and expresses the personal decision to be buried in the same place.

But it was not a question solely of a physical space but of ensuring for this space the religious care and sustained worship that a regular monastic order was better able to guarantee than the secular church, thus opening the way for the characteristic temple-pantheon-religious community formula. In this respect the additional clauses of the Foundational Charter are eloquent: “So that divine worship and other sacred duties may be performed, at El Escorial there must always be one hundred monks, of which at least 70 shall be priests...”.

This is the hub on which the other questions turned, some purely symbolic like the dedication of the monastery to San Lorenzo, in remembrance of the day of the first notable military success of Philip II's reign, the famous battle of San Quintín (10 August 1557), and others simply complementary. Amongst these we would include the foundation of the school, seminary and hospital. The first two were well integrated physically with the monastery, while the hospital or rather infirmary with the Convalescents' Gallery, would in the end form an annexe. The hospital properly speaking was to be built in the village, then town, of El Escorial, which would later come to depend upon the monastery. While the building work was in progress, both the school and the seminar would be moved to the abbey of Santa María de Párraces, in the province of Segovia, which was also to be annexed to the monastery.

No indication has been given of the King's palace in the monastery, for nothing is said about it in the general intentions of the Foundational Charter: it was taken for granted that the monarch would have his own space to judge by one of the additional clauses: “we built in the said Monastery apartments and chamber in which We and the Kings... may stay and accommodate ourselves”. This is just another example which, as Fernando Chueca clearly showed, equally obeys the old and well-loved custom of our monarchs of having their own apartments or palaces in the monasteries which they regularly occupied on retreats, periods of mourning and rest. Of this Philip not only had the immediate example of his father at the monastery of Yuste, where Charles V spent his last years in cloistered silence and religious company, but also the Catholic Kings had a true palace around the great cloister called the Kings' Cloister at the Dominican monastery of Santo Tomás de Avila. Another example was the now demolished Royal Hospice of the Hieronymite monastery of Guadalupe, the palace of the Trastamaras at the Charterhouse of El Paular, the royal palaces at the Cistercian abbeys of Poblet and Santes Creus, and so forth. But in no case were the king's

private apartments as close to the Holy of Holies as they were at Yuste and El Escorial, a degree of proximity which might even appear disrespectful. Never had a pope, bishop, prior or church man in general dared to adopt such familiarity, however respectful and serious this might be as in this case. It makes a profound impression to think of Philip II using these rooms, bedchamber and oratory, with the church altar within sight, as guardian and pious watchdog of orthodoxy, where death suprised the monk-king, his innermost desire thus surely being fulfilled.

This is how Fray José de Sigüenza described the royal demise, at which he was present: "the great

Philip II, son of the emperor Charles V, slept in the Lord, in the very house and temple of San Lorenzo he had built and almost on his own tomb, at five in the morning, when dawn was breaking in the East, the sun bringing the light of Sunday, day of light and of the Lord of light; and the children of the seminary singing the dawn mass, the last mass said for his life and the first of his death, on 13 September, on the octaves of the Nativity of Our Lady, Eve of the Exaltation of the Cross, in the year 1598. On the same day that fourteen years before he had laid the last stone of this house..."

A LANDSCAPE FOR THE MONASTERY

"On the landscape of El Escorial, the Monastery is only the greatest stone that stands out from the surrounding masses by virtue of the greater firmness and polish of its edges..."

(J. Ortega y Gasset, 1915)

Now that we have dealt with what were apparently the private reasons for founding the monastery, we should say something about the choice of site. First we should mention that in 1561 Philip II had established the Court at Madrid, thus conferring on this modest town capital status which caused it to grow immoderately in only a few years, in both population and extension. Sigüenza says: "The King liked above all the town and district of Madrid, for the greater mildness and openness of the sky, and because it is, as it were, in the middle and centre of Spain, where the merchants of his kingdoms may more easily come from everywhere and from here supply them." The truth is that the personal choice of Madrid to the detriment of Toledo, Valladolid or other city already shaped and tried by history, remains one of the many mysteries with no easy answer, which contemporaries always justified with the geometrical argument of the expedience of the centre.

If the King was to go and reside in Madrid, for which purpose he put in hand new work in the old Alcazar to convert it definitively into a royal palace, the logical thing was that the monastery project "which he held in his breast" (Sigüenza) should be at a prudent distance from the town. Finally the King ruled out the site of the Monastery of San Jerónimo de Guisando, in what is now the province of Avila, where he had already spent some retreats, for as well as the ruggedness of the terrain "it was a long way from

Madrid, because he wanted the oratory of this retreat closer at hand, nearer home" (Sigüenza). So for various reasons other places such as Aranjuez and the area of the Real de Manzanares were ruled out one by one, until the persons commissioned, who were said to include philosophers, doctors and architects, set their sights on an area in the sierra that separates Madrid, Segovia and Avila. The King travelled there to see for himself the place on the south flank of the Sierra de Guadarrama, at the foot of Abantos, and found it just the right choice. All this happened in 1561, that is, the capital status of Madrid and the search for a site for the monastery went hand in hand in the royal mind.

It was apparently the Hieronymite monks who played a leading role in selecting the site, as is implied by several of the King's letters. In particular, when wishing to "make a resolution about the place", the monarch, in the town of Guadarrama, on 30 November 1561, bids Fray Juan de Colmenar, vicar of the monastery of Guisando, and the prior of Zamora Fray Juan de Huete, to go with his secretary Pedro de Hoyo and other religious and officials, who would have included the architect Juan Bautista de Toledo, and see "the place where it has seemed to us the said monastery should be built".

The choice of the place had many detractors, the most critical being the anonymous author of a *Sátira Contra el Sitio de El Escorial*, contemporary with the building, in which it is described as "discourteous

land, this town of El Escorial, a town without politeness, hapless mountain, uncongenial place, where, save for the building and the holy and sacred things of that monastery, all else is loathsome, all abominable. There the earth has no earth, but boulders; the sky no horizon, for to all the north and west and part of the south the high mountains not only hide part of the hemisphere but also obstruct the better and healthier winds... The waters are raw, the winds piercing, the cold insufferable, the heat intolerable, the meat lean, the fish rotten, the fruit tasteless, the vegetables long-stalked, the flowers odourless, the women colourless..."

Against the harsh, vicious prose of the author of this satire, of which only a fragment is quoted here, who in some respects is right, one should set the kinder picture of the anonymous poet who with variants is drawn on by authors like Fray Juan de San Jerónimo and Luis Cabrera de Córdoba. The latter, the chronicler of Philip II's reign, includes it in his *Historia Laurentina* (1581) as follows:

*It lies on the high mount of Carpetano
On the flank that drops to the south,
Limit of the great kingdom of Toledo,
In a place that God favoured,
With great woods, a very lovely place,
And springs that the earth brought forth,
Of all those on earth the happiest,
For it has a building so famous.*

The justification for the choice of site was backed up by its advantages, that is, the seven leagues that separated it from Madrid, the altitude that guaranteed a mild temperature in summer, the possibility of building the monastery facing south to withstand the winter cold while it was protected by the mountains in the rear, plentiful good quality waters and, above all, "an abundance of purple stone, mixed with an honest white, with a good grain, with brown and black specks..." (Sigüenza), that is outcrops of granite that would ensure at a low cost a supply of the material

for the basic construction: it was this stone that was finally to define the monastery within its landscape, beyond the art of the architects and the hands of the stonecutters. Ortega y Gasset was right when he wrote in his *Meditación del Escorial*: "the built stone escapes the intentions of the builder and, obeying a more powerful instinct, merges with its parent quarries". In this view of the monastery as just another accident of the landscape he coincides in part with Father Sigüenza, who states that the stone architecture of the monastery "looks as though all the great fabric is all of a piece and dug out of a crag", which enabled him to introduce an erudite comparison with the city that Deinocrates proposed to Alexander the Great.

Ortega himself was to leave some deeply felt lines giving a literary picture of the Escorial landscape, the one which he had in sight when writing his *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914): "The Monastery of El Escorial stands on a small hill. The south side of this hill descends under cover of a grove of both oak and ash. The exemplary purple mass of the building modifies its character, according to season, thanks to this mantle of luxuriant growth spread at its feet, coppery in winter, golden in autumn and dark green in summer. Spring passes through here swift, impetuous, instantaneous and excessive —like an erotic image through the steel-armoured soul of the cenobite. The trees are speedily covered with opulent fronds of a clear new green; the soil disappears beneath a grass of emerald which one day is carpeted with the yellow of daisies, another with the bright blue of lavender..."

In contrast to this colourful lyricism —for Ortega the monastery of El Escorial was "our great lyrical stone"— these men who chose the site acted like true scientists in the classical mode, even following the advice of Vitruvius regarding the choice of healthy places for "building a city". In this constant emulation of Antiquity, Doctor Almela, in his manuscript *Descripción de la Octava Maravilla del Mundo* (1594), says about the site of the monastery: "The place is situated, according to the rules of good cosmography, in the centre of the fifth climate, where, almost on the same

latitude, lies Rome, the capital of the world. If the cosmographers of Antiquity had to define the fifth climate today, they would say it is the zone of the latitude on which Rome and Sant Lorenzo de El Escorial lie.”

When selecting the El Escorial site, no less important was the abundance of pine forests relatively nearby, like Valsaín (Segovia), Quexigal and Navaluenga (Avila), as well as the more distant forests of Cuenca, which provided all the timber necessary for the building; the pine groves we see today above the monastery are modern ones. The possibility of supplying *in situ* other materials absolutely necessary for the work was greatly born in mind, and in this respect Pedro de Hoyo wrote in delight to the King about the abundance of lime and sand in the immediate vicinity. The place also had two great grazing grounds, La Herrería and La Fresneda. The former, skirting the wall of the monastery orchard, with good trees, would be most useful for the timber and game it could furnish, and seen from the convent “it looks like a copse of basil in summer, which is a great balm to solitude and to the eyes” (Sigüenza).

The second ground, La Fresneda, the name of which (The Ash Grove) indicates the prevalent species of tree, is closely linked to the monastery although it is further away than La Herrería, for it was from there that in part the building of San Lorenzo was experienced and watched over. In effect, a house with steep, slender roofs was built at La Fresneda, in which Philip II lived. Beside it a small monastic organisation was built around a cloister with cells which the Hieronymites occupied: the whole thing displayed the intelligence of its architect Gaspar de Vega. A modest church, beautiful gardens, fountains, ponds with water from the River Aulencia, arbours and so forth completed the complex at La Fresneda, making it a real Royal Residence, of a beauty and freshness belied by its present state.

Between La Herrería and La Fresneda lies the small town of El Escorial, of which Juan de Mariana, in *Del Rey y de la Institución real*, had this to say: “far from being elegant the first houses in this village were rough

and crudely built, not at all odd when we realise how uninterested peasants are in building: they pay much attention to utility and little to ornamentation.” Although modest it was the largest inhabited nucleus in this deserted landscape into which the royal project breathed new life, unlike other places in the vicinity such as the two municipalities of Monasterio and Campillo; these were acquired by Philip II and turned into pasture grounds and woods, their residents being obliged to “settle somewhere else”.

El Escorial soon came to boast a whole series of privileges and exemptions, becoming a town with its “gallows, knife, prison and stocks, and all the other insignia of jurisdiction”, according to the charter of privilege and favour bestowed by Philip II (1565), thereby ceasing to belong to the Community and Land of Segovia; at the same time in the ecclesiastical order it freed its parish from the Archbishopric of Toledo, according to a grace granted by papal bulls of Gregory XIII (1585) and Sixtus V (1586). After those dates El Escorial came both temporally and spiritually under the prior of the monastery of San Lorenzo, who enjoyed wide powers in the jurisdiction of this new ecclesiastical domain generously bestowed by the King and his successors.

The architecture and appearance of El Escorial were gradually renovated: only the parish church of San Bernabé (1594), by Francisco de Mora, a pupil of Juan de Herrera, became monumental. The village, with a population of between eighty and a hundred, did not grow as might have been expected on account of the building work, for a Royal Letters Patent given in Madrid in 1563 banned settlement in El Escorial, making express mention of the “labourers in the Monastery”. The aim of this was to ensure the seclusion, peace and quiet of the monastic complex which only saw in the 18th century the lifting of other wise restrictions and cautions made by Philip II, for example the ban on building in the vicinity of the monastery.

However, under the Bourbons and in particular during the reign of Charles III, the monastery was

regularly home to the monarch, who was happy to prolong the hunting season at El Escorial through the autumn. Since the Court followed the King on these sojourns, the monastery thus lost some of the austerity and silence demanded by Philip II. The need for accommodation on those dates moved Charles III, in agreement with the Hieronymite community, to issue a decree (1767) with its corresponding rulings “to which persons who wish to build houses there shall submit”. The requirements imposed include a ban on using such houses outside the royal sojourn or season, remaining empty the rest of the year. But this was the beginning of the end of the monastery as a monastic *desert*, for an urban nucleus was formed which was never to stop growing; in our own times it is going through an apparently unlimited process of expansion with all that this signifies in terms of the radical transformation of the landscape around the monastery, which Philip II would not recognise. Thus the old Escorial or Lower Escorial witnessed the growth, beside the monastery, of the new San Lorenzo de El Escorial or Upper Escorial, in an urban duality which changed for the worse the immediate and not so immediate surroundings of Philip’s foundation.

By contrast, the mountains that encircle the monastery and its environs have become greener: what in times past were sheer bare slopes have been swathed in pines and firs since the end of the last century. All these mountains form the foothills of the

Sierra de Guadarrama dominated by the towering Risco de Abantos. From there we command a view of the Leonese Ravine running through nearby Malagón Pass; further, to the right, the Machotas and at its feet the crag with the Seat of Philip II from which he could watch the progress of the building; below the monastery, just as Rubens immortalised it in the Escorial landscape now kept in Salisbury, having belonged to the royal collection of Charles II of England. Ahead, in the direction of Madrid, the verdant plateau of La Fresneda, Campillo and Monasterio, and so on: these are the places that constitute the landscape, both immediate and distant, of the monastery of El Escorial, dotted with old hermitages, gullies and paths, pastures bordered with stone, streams and springs which ensure fresh pasture or feed the water tanks of the monastery, granite crags and slabs which once felt the touch of the stonecutters and were then abandoned, like the meadow of Alberquilla, in a word, ashes, oak trees and groves which here and there colour the horizon, not forgetting the lush sweet-smelling thickets of rockroses like the one that carpeted the site upon which the monastery was to be built. “Tell me the landscape you live in and I will tell you who you are” Ortega said in *Pedagogía del paisaje*; and if the landscape shapes one half of the soul, we now know something more of that Prudent King who preferred this to other horizons with which to share his spirit.

MEN, PLANS AND MODELS

“Because we have commissioned Juan Bautista de Toledo, our architect, with this work, to continue and complete it, according to the plan and model he is making...”

(Philip II, 1562)

The site having been chosen, creators had to be found able to interpret Philip II's dream by means of an architectural solution with room for so many subtle requirements. The King appears to have considered this question also from early on, for in the summer of that so significant year 1561, namely the year when Madrid was made capital and the site for the monastery was chosen, the King appointed Juan Bautista de Toledo, who had come from Rome where he had worked in Michelangelo's team on St. Peter's in the Vatican, to “here and from now on, for all your life, to be our Architect and as such you are to serve us and to serve in making the plans and models that we shall command and in all our works, buildings and other things pertaining to the said craft of Architect”. These brief lines are of great importance in our history of architecture for this is the first time an architect to the King is appointed with an exclusiveness that the royal letter reveals, while it defines the principal duty of his “craft of architect”, that is, to make the “models” and “plans” for the royal projects.

Juan Bautista de Toledo had already been in Spain for some time, having lived there since Philip II had summoned him in 1559, building a variety of works for the King in Aranjuez and other royal seats. This prestigious appointment for the moment side-stepped the important group of architects active in Spain, some like Gaspar de Vega very close to the

King; it also disregarded others likewise connected with royal works, such as the elderly Covarrubias y Villalpando, and ignored both the formidable Andalusian group of the Siloes, Vandelvira, Hernán Ruiz, etc., and the Salamanca group around Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón who, nonetheless, would later be consulted by Philip.

We tend to interpret this as showing that the King wished to link his foundation to an architectural image hitherto unknown in Spain and to a certain extent detached from the handsome architecture that had developed its own tradition over the first sixty years of the 16th century. The desire for a new architecture that might render a style of royal government, official, majestic, distant, and universal, must again and again have crossed the calculating mind of Philip II who here, as in many other things, acted without leaving the smallest detail to chance. For this purpose he indeed looked for the interpreter of the royal foundation in a Spanish architect, but one trained and experienced in Italy on a work, St Peter's, which San Lorenzo de El Escorial in some way was to rival as a bastion of the Catholic faith. What doubt can there be that Roman Tridentine architecture had more possibilities of universality and timelessness, to which the works of Philip had always aspired, than the Spanish Renaissance. A little like Latin as opposed to Castilian. Who better than Juan Bautista de Toledo to build this bridge between Spain and Italy.

It was in effect this architect who brought the Italian influence to Spanish architecture through El Escorial, the monastery acting as a filter into which so very many ideas were poured and stirred that in subsequent years some of them bore fruit, beyond the immediate surroundings of the Guadarrama landscape. In this respect Chueca's happy expression reaches its full scope when he defines El Escorial as "prophetic stone". Father Sigüenza left us a most complimentary portrait of Juan Bautista de Toledo, whom he describes as an example of the humanist architect: "a man of lofty judgement in Architecture, worthy of our equating him with Bramante... a man of many parts, a sculptor, who understood drawing well; he knew Latin and Greek, was well versed in Philosophy and Mathematics; in a word, there were in him many of the parts that Vitruvius, the prince of architects, expects those who are to practice architecture and call themselves masters of it to possess."

However his early death in 1567 prevented him from carrying the work through to completion, although the basic project, what we have come to call the *universal plan*, is by him. Substantial modifications were made to this in which other architects intervened, as will be discussed later, in particular Juan de Herrera, but, we repeat, the fundamental idea for the building and its distribution was the legacy of Juan Bautista de Toledo. The image of finished perfection today offered by the monastery conceals the painstaking elaboration of the final project which was not devoid of problems, some due to the not always easy nature of Juan Bautista de Toledo, others to the functional requirements of the Hieronymite monks; and some due to the King himself, when for example he laid down that one hundred monks instead of fifty should form the monastic community.

All this, coupled with Philip's desire for a perfect work, led to delays and continual differences of opinion on the plans and models produced by Juan Bautista de Toledo. So, in a quest for absolute certainty, the King asked for advice from friends and outsiders, submitting Juan Bautista de Toledo's solutions to other ar-

chitects and corporations for their opinions. One well-known reaction was the critical and dismissive reports made by the Italian architect Francesco Paciotto in 1562 on the monastery church included in the universal plan of Juan Bautista de Toledo. Later, in 1564, Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón signed a report on various aspects of the work, in which the church continued to receive preferential attention and concern: "we have seen the plan and also the pillars of the Church in the same plan and having seen them, we say that the walls have sufficient thickness..., according to the heights and sizes of the building...". In 1566 the King again requested a new project for the church from his royal architect and also asked Gaspar de Vega for a revision of the plans of Juan Bautista de Toledo. The following year, 1567, coinciding with the death of Juan Bautista de Toledo, a set of plans for the monastery's church was sent to the Accademia dell'Arte in Florence for an opinion. The reply was a long time in coming, but brought new ideas and drawings which some authors associate with the Italian architects Vignola, Galeazzo Alessi and even Palladio. But these Italian plans and ideas reached Spain in 1573 when the work was well advanced, and Philip II himself wrote in his own hand: "The plans for the church awaited from Italy are now come, and I do not believe there will be much to take from them."

In other words, the project of Juan Bautista de Toledo was subjected to fierce criticism in which the Hieronymite monks themselves took part, more concerned with the functional utility of the plan than with its formal and aesthetic aspects. This is shown by several letters, the one sent in 1564 by the prior Juan de Huete to the King's secretary, Pedro del Hoyo, being most illustrative for the history of the architecture of the monastic orders. He remitted "the plans as... they came because so as not to erase them I did not put anything on them, but I put it in the report... and the point is that although Juan Bautista de Toledo be the great master he is and if he knew only what all the Roman authors knew, he cannot achieve the particular things that are necessary in a monastery...; it seems

to me, and I have told Juan Bautista de Toledo several times, that it would have been a most fruitful thing for him... to have a look around and see five or six monasteries of our order... because every order has its way of life and they are very different and they are so in terms of their buildings..." The search for this match between the specific needs of a Hieronymite monastery and the most abstract proposal for an ideal monastery project produced by Toledo was, in fact, the cause of many a controversy which the King had to moderate in order to bring the work successfully to completion. This necessitated a perpetual ferrying of plans back and forth from Madrid to El Escorial, La Fresneda or wherever the King happened to be; for the opinion of the priors who had so much responsibility throughout the process, for fresh revision by the architect, for the incorporation of modifications, for answers to the questions raised in the King's reports... The plans passed through the hands of the royal secretary who dispatched them hither and thither and were taken back and forth by the foremen builders, copies were made to which the changes could be added... A special room had to be set aside for them at both La Fresneda and El Escorial and of course at the Alcázar in Madrid, where Juan Bautista de Toledo had what we might call his studio.

This coming and going of the designs is well illustrated by a letter, chosen from many, from the prior Father Juan Huete at El Escorial (27.VII.1564) to the royal secretary in Madrid, to be passed on in turn to the King, in which this constant movement of the plans is mentioned: "I have been unable before to send the plans sent by Your Majesty... and the reply to the report, because I had given the plan which came from there to Tolosa for him to make a copy of it and he left... and did not leave the plan that came from there, now the two plans are with the reply to the report, and the plan that came from there, is leaving as it came, without anything being put in it, because it came without titles explaining anything, and it was not fully drawn." A manuscript note of Philip II on the letter adds: "Although in the report they have sent they

do not satisfy all that they are asked, it remains for me to see them for longer with the plans". With all this to-ing and fro-ing it is easy to imagine how the initial project was gradually modified, which leads Sigüenza to say at one point that while the ground plan designed by Juan Bautista de Toledo "is little different from the present one, the elevation was changed a great deal."

As well as the drawing of the project, as well as all these plans, practically all lost in the fire at the Alcázar in 1734 and in subsequent vicissitudes and sales, Juan Bautista de Toledo made several total and partial models of the work so that the monastery as a whole might be appreciated three-dimensionally. We know that the architect was especially familiar with this system of representation thanks to his time in Italy, and to some extent it must have been a revelation in Spain, even though it was common practice, well documented throughout the Spanish Renaissance, to make models of buildings as a formula more expressive of the project than plans. The fact is that Sigüenza weighed up Juan Bautista de Toledo's models, enlarging on their usefulness, "for there errors are remedied, with no damage, that afterwards would have no remedy or be very costly, and there what was not quite right is more accurately perfected."

Cabrera comments that Juan Bautista showed the monastery "in a wooden model of the whole work, so that together it might be better seen and in its figure and distribution what was seen to be necessary might be changed, for its improvement, it being difficult to get so many things right the first time". Changes were indeed made on this and other models, with the advantage over the two-dimensional plans that it was quicker and easier to understand, in a continual process of testing and changing. Thus not many months before his death, Juan Bautista made another different model for the main staircase of the cloister which was built by Jerónimo Gili (1567), "Juan Bautista brought the model of the staircase, I made him take it to the Monastery...", writes Philip II. After the architect's death, other solutions for this staircase were

soon under scrutiny, several models being seen including the one made by the Italian Juan Bautista Castello, *El Bergamasco*. Thus, as the work progressed many other models were added. The one of the church on which the carver Martín de Aciaga worked for at least two years (1573-1575) must have been considerable in size in contrast with the *very small form* of Juan Bautista de Toledo's aforementioned general model (Sigüenza), for the base on which it stood measured 280×176 centimetres and several wagons were needed to convey it, in pieces, from Madrid where it was made to El Escorial.

Models for the monastery roofs, models for the choir stalls executed by the fine artist Jusepe Flecha, models "for a hundred other things... and for certain devices and machines" (Sigüenza) used for the construction of El Escorial, speak to us of their importance and make us feel all the more regret at their loss, especially of the main ones which, kept in the monastery lofts, must have been consumed in the unfortunate fire of the 17th century.

Juan Bautista de Toledo having died at a critical moment for the building work (1567), the King was obliged to think of a successor; this was none other than Juan de Herrera, associated with the work since in 1563 he had been appointed with Juan de Valencia, Toledo's assistant for the drawings. The subsequent genius displayed by Juan de Herrera for resolving practical and engineering questions, introducing machines and cranes and improving the economy and organisation of the work, made him deserving of the King's trust to direct the works and to make the new plans required, to the point that he became, *de facto*, the director of the project. The greatest fame has come to rest on him, somewhat eclipsing Juan Bautista de Toledo, in so far as it was Juan de Herrera who truly made the monastery what it is today, after seventeen years of sustained work at the head of that most complex architectural machine. Juan de Arfe refers to this when he says that Herrera, "taking the model that was left from Juan Bautista, began to erect all this fabric with great accomplishment, adding things necessary

for the service of its residents which cannot be perceived until necessity points them out. Thus he carried it through with the innumerable people under his direction."

Herrera's rich personality and wide-ranging background was well summed up by his contemporary Fray Juan de San Jerónimo in his manuscript *Memorias*, who refers to him as "architect, mathematician and engineer". However the measure of his talent and his boundless scientific curiosity is seen in the collection of books, manuscripts and mathematical instruments he built up in his studio, the inventory of which has come down to us. The part he played in the monastery, starting from Juan Bautista de Toledo's universal plan which he corrected, enlarged and renewed, is reflected in the well-known stanzas devoted to him by Juan de Arfe:

*This was Juan de Herrera, born in Trasmiera,
Who proceeds, putting it into practice,
Continually amending and adding,
As necessity demands.*

This dedication to the monastery is more astonishing when we learn that he combined it with many other royal commissions (Aranjuez, Toledo, Simancas, Granada, Lisbon, Segovia, Seville, etc.) which moreover were not exclusively architectural, for in 1579 he took up the office of head chamberlain of the palace, that is, the same appointment with which years later Philip V was to reward the great painter Diego Velázquez.

This was possible thanks to the discipline and method Herrera injected into his works, in particular after the well known royal *Instruction* of 1572 which regulated the general government of El Escorial. In this the prior of the monastery, now Fray Hernando de Ciudad Real, was appointed superintendent, administrator and head of the management of the building work. With a group of Hieronymites this man had occupied the completed part of the monastery since 1571. Amongst his main duties was the task of always

having in his possession “a fair copy of all the plans” of the monastery. Also stipulated is the attendance of the royal accountant and supervisor who with the prior formed the so-called Congregation. The number of foremen builders is set at four, two for stoneworking, one for carpentry and one for masonry, and the duties of each are enumerated, and thus, successively, a complete organisational chart is drawn up with no loose ends which made order possible: working hours, salaries, wages, piecework rates, payments, materials, surveillance, carting, supplies, etc. One particularly notable aspect of the rules is the repeated presence of a name, the only one mentioned throughout the *Instrucción*: the lay brother Fray Antonio de Villacastín: “and for things pertaining to the building... Fr. Antonio de Villacastín shall be sent for, and they shall hear his opinion on the matter”. Villacastín undoubtedly represented the King’s eye on the building, and so great was Philip’s regard for and confidence in this brother, a man of few words but of great natural talent, that Sigüenza said that the King “wanted the architect Juan de Herrera to do nothing that he did not communicate first with Fray Antonio and, if he was not content, then the King did not assent.”

As well as Villacastín, the real works manager, many other men were directly associated with the design and construction of San Lorenzo: amongst others are recalled the names of the stonework foremen Pedro de Tolosa, Lucas de Escalante and Juan de Minjares, all of immense importance in and outside El Escorial,

as central figures in the execution and in part diffusion of Herreran architecture beyond the Guadarrama area. It would be impossible, and this is not now our task, to reflect all those who contributed to the building of the royal monastery from their various posts and categories, but it is easy to imagine that a work of such magnitude was the result of a collective effort which is here assumed to be immense, the “nameless effort” Ortega y Gasset speaks of.

Finally, in compensation for the loss of the plans and models of El Escorial, engravings have acquainted us with part of what the great complex must have been, through the plates made by the Flemish engraver Pierre Perret with the designs of Juan de Herrera. This series of engravings after the original drawings, exclusive rights to the publication of which were acquired by Juan de Herrera, is the most accurate representation of the monastery. It was published in Madrid, in 1589, under the title *Sumario y breve declaración de los diseños y estampas de la Fábrica de San Lorenzo el Real del Escorial*. The series comprises eleven designs with the ground plan, elevations and sections (*ortographias*) and a perspective (*scenographia*) suggested by one of the models mentioned; overall they bring together the most important features of the ensemble, which also include the retablo of the church, the sacrarium and the monstrance. These prints, accompanied by short texts, spread to the world the image of El Escorial, hinting at the beauty of the original plans here expertly summarised.

BUILDING APACE

"On 23 April 1563 it seemed to Juan Bautista de Toledo that it was time to start the fabric and lay the first stone..."

(Fr. José de Sigüenza, 1604)

The site having been chosen and the plans taking shape, the most basic preparations were put in hand in order to start the building. This occupied the early months of 1562 when the embryonic Hieronymite community of San Lorenzo was organised, now formed solely by the prior, a vicar and six friars, one of whom was to be cook, another treasurer and the third gardener. A house with a kitchen garden was bought for them, in El Escorial, which they were to arrange for themselves and the servants at their disposal. At the same time the need to appoint two persons, one to act as bookkeeper and supervisor and the other as paymaster, became evident, "because it seems it would be a good idea to give the business a master". The acquisition of two chests each for a specific amount of money and the purchase of some herds of goats and sheep for meat and milk complete the series of basic measures.

At the same time, on the esplanade on which San Lorenzo was to be built, where "all the stone that is within the quadrangle of the monastery" was to be removed, an inventory of materials and tools was commissioned, the purchase of carts, teams of oxen and mules was estimated; water was channelled and piped into a deposit; the construction of "six huts where the working people may retire" was planned; four kilns would be made for the limestone and a further four for firing the bricks "in the manner that Señor Juan Bautista shall say"; it would also be necessary to build

"a workshop where the work of stonecutting may be carried out under a roof"; in a word, an entire second series of measures which would allow the monastery building work to be put in hand.

Once the site had been cleared of rockroses and stones it was visited by various dignitaries, including the King on his return from a Holy Week retreat in the Hieronymite monastery of Guisando, accompanied by people like the Marquis of Cortes and the Count of Chinchón, both greatly involved with the building process from what has come to be interpreted as the "architectural council", of which another member was to be the royal secretary so often mentioned, Pedro del Hoyo. In the presence of Philip II, whom we imagine serious but immensely hopeful about the accomplishment of his venture, the ropes were thrown and the first stakes were driven in to mark out the ground plan of the monastery, all under the close direction of Juan Bautista de Toledo. The nobles present, the Duke of Feria and the Prince of Eboli, equipped with hoes, then started digging; the laying of the foundations was to take the rest of that year and much of the following ones, for "His Majesty commands that the foundations be dug and laid for the part now designed to be built; and then they will be dug as is deemed fit". That is to say, Philip II is anxious to see the actual building emerge and impatiently orders this to be done "with as much haste as possible". Stonecutters, carpenters and masons as well as a large number of labourers were

now appearing at El Escorial in search of work. This coincided with the arrival of the man who was to be the director of works, Fray Antonio de Villacastín. Finally, the Italian architect Paccioto passed through Madrid, where he was able to see the Monastery designs and was asked by the King for plans for the church. These were the highlights of the year 1562, the year that the work finally got under way and the ground prepared.

The next year, 1563, saw important developments such as the association of Herrera with the El Escorial project and the arrival of the prior Fray Juan de Huete who, like the Hieronymites who succeeded him in the post, played a decisive role in the progress and direction of the works. More significant was the laying of the first stone of the monastery, on 23 April 1563, "in the foundation of the refectory beneath the prior's seat", according to Fray Juan de San Jerónimo. He also recounts that neither the King nor the prior were there but the vicar Fray Juan de Colmenar, Fray Juan de San Jerónimo himself and Fray Antonio de Villacastín, with various other monks. The professionals and what we might call technicians present included of course Juan Bautista de Toledo and his two foremen, Pedro de Tolosa, in charge of stonecutting, with whom the architect was frequently to clash, and Gregorio Robles, in charge of masonry. There was also Andrés de Almaguer, accountant and supervisor, and "many master craftsmen and some servants of His Majesty, including Juan de Paz, paymaster of the work; Juan de Soto, constable; Pedro de Llaneras, scribe; Pedro Ramos, in charge of the oxen, and Pedro Sánchez, overseer, and many others." (Fr. Juan de S. Jerónimo). Amongst the witnesses to that simple ceremony, at which dignitaries were conspicuous by their absence, was Juan de Herrera, who had joined the project as assistant to Juan Bautista de Toledo. It was apparently Herrera who drafted the inscriptions on the faces of the first ashlar, which along with the year and the King's name featured the architect Juan Bautista de Toledo. But the laying of the first stone of the church, on 20 August of the same year, was a different and

more solemn occasion, attended by the King, the prior, Fray Bernardo de Fresneda, the Bishop of Cuenca and confessor to the King, the Duke of Alba and the Marquis of Las Navas, amongst others, as well as the architect and other individuals connected with the work.

The first stone of the church was laid between the altar of San Jerónimo and the passageway from the church to the sacristy, that is, on the south side of the monastery complex. This grew over the years from south to north, first the monastery area proper being completed, then the church and King's private palace behind it, and finally the school and palace area. But this was to take a long time, for the designs were still not fully defined, there were problems in the administration and management of the project which called for a first Royal Instruction in 1563, and the work of laying the foundations was very slow.

This slowness was at odds with the impatience of the King, who wished to see the building take shape: the documentation reflects a sharp contrast between the need to "dig down" to lay the appropriate foundations and the King's eagerness to "make", that is to build, to put up the building. Consequently, the years until the death of Juan Bautista de Toledo in 1567 yielded a very ragged outline, for the south facade and its immediate vicinity, which was all that had been "made" to date, consisted of sections of wall of different heights, while in other areas the foundations had not even been dug. As mentioned earlier with reference to the plans, all this denotes frequent changes of criteria and clashes within the project. Thus, the Prior approached the King (1564) to point out "unworthy" faults, some material and others ones of criterion. The most salient was his criticism of the number of cells which in his view were too few, so that "many houses of our order and even of those which are not so prominent will outstrip [it]". He also found that the cloisters in the convent area "were such a little thing that they are nothing".

These and other questions had a basic repercussion on the progress of the work: as a result architects such as Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón and Hernán González

de Lara were called upon to review the built work, the King doubled the number of cells for the monks, from fifty to one hundred, Juan Bautista was obliged to modify the initial project which led to the demolition of parts of the so-called Apothecary or Infirmary Tower, and so on. The new project presented by Juan Bautista de Toledo, while not altering the floor plan, greatly changed the elevations, for the addition of fifty cells made it necessary to enlarge proportionally all the other communal spaces, from the refectory to the kitchens and lavatories. And some changes inevitably brought others in their wake, so that two towers at the head of the church and two others in the centre of the north and south facades disappeared while the two towers on the actual main facade were made taller. The differences between the first project and the eventually final one in its general conception may thus be seen, for the initial universal design was constantly being improved. So the work started to fall behind even though the workers were given occupation preparing materials and digging foundations, while others continued to arrive at El Escorial to work on other things that signified the completion of the project, for example the illuminators of the choir books. This is excellent evidence that Philip II, mentally anticipating the actual process of the work, was certain of its completion in a reasonable time by when everything should be ready.

The next year, 1565, saw the death of Prior Huete, who was succeeded by Fray Juan de Colmenar. The building continued with no problems other than the normal ones in such a major project or administrative ones relating to payments and taxes, or ones due to the illness and absence of those in charge. Huete had already advised the King that "a great fault in such a large work is that neither the master builder nor the foremen builders be resident therein, for their wives and homes being elsewhere, they must of necessity go to them often as they have been doing to date, and with much indisposition they go to their homes". More serious was the illness which beset Juan Bautista de Toledo, who died on 19 May 1567, a month after send-

ing the last designs and models to El Escorial. Arfe says that Toledo died "at the time when the arches of this famous building were beginning to rise and his death caused much sadness and confusion, on account of the lack of confidence that another such a man would be found."

That man was to be Herrera, as we have already mentioned, who not only solved many problems of all types but also managed to impose an extraordinary pace on the work, which no doubt pleased the King. Several factors contributed to this: the Instructions of 1569, in particular the one of 1572 and the New Instruction of 1575; the use of machines and devices designed by Herrera, who told the prior Julián de Tricio: "it is to be regretted that they have begun to be used so late, because as has been demonstrated, many labourers and much expense can be saved and time gained"; the contracting of the work by the piece instead of by the day; the distribution of work to be done between several teams or pieces, as finally done in the church; the new way of organising work in the quarries, the ashlar masonry being brought when the building work was practically completed; "His Majesty determined that the stone should be brought half worked from the quarry, and that the order of the Architect be followed, because... savings were made on carting", etc. And he held the maximum responsibility, providing all the designs for the vast amount of work still to be done: main facade, library, church, school, palace...

A drawing and a text are extant which express better than any other testimony the almost epic feel of the breathtaking pace of building under Juan de Herrera. Indeed, the action and energy displayed by man, beast and machine moved Sigüenza to say that he knew not "whether this house under construction was not a more admirable, a fresher and merrier sight than it is now when perfect and completed." These words evince a certain wistful nostalgia for that unique effort and understanding which made of the building process itself an exceptional spectacle. The drawing in question, which I have analyzed in detail elsewhere,

belongs to Lord Salisbury and has been attributed, on different grounds, to Castello, Granello, Juan de Herrera and Rodrigo de Holanda. Leaving aside the question of its authorship, which for the moment consigns the drawing to an unquiet anonymity, what is truly interesting about this drawing is that as it was done from one of the wooden models now lost, it offers an extraordinary perspective showing the finished part of the convent, the King's private palace, also finished, in the foreground, the church under construction and the school and palace still undefined. But while this is the essential core of the drawing, the circumstantial details included are equally important, for the author emphasized those aspects that in a combination of ingenuity and hard work made it possible for Philip II's dream to become a reality; that is he emphasized the speed of the work, when building was going on "at a furious pace" according to a contemporary witness. It was then that the venture was joined by new people, for example Juan de Minjares, who took over as foreman in charge of stonecutting, apparently being more closely identified "with the order of building" of Herrera. The whole building process was thereby further speeded up from this crucially important post.

For a summary of this new impetus, who better than Luis Cabrera de Córdoba in his *History of Philip II* (1619): "Many different machines, all very tall, were employed to erect the building, cranes, saw-horses, counterweights, stakes and posts with which it grew at a frightful rate, because the masters, skilled workers and labourers, it was evident, were working in friendly contention and eagerness to perfect their allotted tasks, more than for what they stood to earn, each one seeking to be the first in helping the other in a harmonious bustling, a multiplicity of people, languages, voices, without clashing, without blundering in the haste and strange diligence in the motley crowd, agreeing to command, to obey, to work all as one. Wonderful was the providence, the promptness, punctuality, the plenty of the countless materials for so many different types of work, so that if they were

spilled they would cover a vast tract of country, and one would admire the grandeur of each thing, and if piled up they would be sufficient to found a city. The sackers and devastators of stone filled the countryside cutting large crags into pieces of such a size, that some were hauled with difficulty by forty-five pairs of oxen, which with mules were multitudinous, and their punctuality in service and allotted hours considerable..."

No less interesting is the origin of the materials brought together on the site from the most diverse places, colourfully described by Cabrera de Córdoba. "The workers and suppliers throughout Europe and America were legion. In the Sierra de Bernardos they extracted slate; in Burgo de Osma and Espeja, coloured jasper; on the bank of the Genil, near Granada, green; in Aracena and elsewhere, black; red and other attractive colours; in Filabres, white marble; in Extremoz and Las Navas, milky, grey and striped... The pine forests of Cuenca, Valsaín, Quejigal and Las Navas resounded with axes and saws as towering pines were felled and split. In the Indies ebony, cedar, bully tree, mahogany, guaiacum, rosewood was cut down; in the mountains of Toledo and Cuenca, terebinth; in the Pyrenees, boxwood; in the Alcarria, walnut..."

But it was not only raw materials that were brought from elsewhere: many workshops operated far from Escorial, executing the work and then sending it from its points of origin: "In Toledo marble figures were executed; in Milan, bronze and in Madrid, for the altarpiece and tombs, and the bases and capitals, and the precious monstrance and reliquary; in Aragon, the main bronze gratings, in Guadalajara, Avila and Biscay, the iron ones; in Flanders large, medium and small bronze candelabra, and ones of strange forms..."

The building was gradually completed despite setbacks such as the strike or mutiny of the quarry workers and the fire in the Apothecary or Infirmary Tower, which appeared to be dogged by ill luck (1577). Indeed, Fray Juan de San Jerónimo describes very expressively the series of misfortunes which befell this area: "It should be known that in this tower of the

apothecary since its foundations were begun until today, many misfortunes have come to pass; the first was the first quarrel of father Fray Antonio, the director of works, with the craftsmen; the first quarrel of Juan Bautista, chief architect of His Majesty, with Pedro de Tolosa, his foreman; the very first error in all the work; the first crane to break; the first labourer to die; the fire from the sky to fall upon it and the fall from the scaffolding...”

In successive years the altarpiece was commissioned (1579), which was to be made “all according to designs of Herrera’s”, and the sculpture for the church; by 1581 the palace could be said to have been completed, and the following year the dome of the church was crowned. The bulk of the work was complete, according to Fray Antonio de Villacastín: “on the 13th day in September 1584 the last stone of this building of San Lorenzo el Real was laid, on the cornice of the portico on the left as we enter through the portico courtyard; on it a black + was made on the cornice and on the underside a case was made in which written on parchment was the date and year, the Gospels with other holy things and who was the King and the Pope, and the prior of this house and other things worth recording...”

The portico courtyard is none other than the Kings’ Courtyard before coming to the church, and this stone may still be seen, with the cornice corresponding to the outline of the corbel beneath the eaves; on the renovated roof a set of slates outlines the cross identifying this “last” stone. However, there was still a great deal to do and many stones to be laid. For example the Pavilion in the Evangelists’ Courtyard was missing, not being contracted until 1586. Only in 1593 were the statues of the Evangelists set on the facade of the church. And it was not until 1598-1600 that the groups at prayer of Charles V and Philip II were put in place at the sides of the presbytery... Juan de Herrera had died in 1597, to be followed a year later by Philip II.

The remains of the monarch were placed in the crypt beneath the high altar, but here, too, much remained to be done to achieve the desired image. This was to be undertaken during the reign of Philip IV, with the Italian Juan Bautista Crescenzi in charge of the project and construction (1617-1635) and with the intervention of the Spaniards Fray Nicolás de Madrid, Alonso Carbonell and Bartolomé de Zumbigo (1654), so that between them all they overcame the set of major difficulties posed by the undertaking. The final result, just as we see it today, also boasted its praise-filled chronicle, this time by Fray Francisco de los Santos, who left us a *Descripción Breve del Monasterio de S. Lorenzo* (1657), not so brief and with a wealth of fascinating details about what he called the monastery’s crown, that is the Royal Chapel of the Pantheon.

Apart from the odd piece of work, such as that carried out in the sacristy, nothing new of note was done in the interior of the monastery until the 18th century, when under the reign of Charles IV Juan de Villanueva was commissioned to renovate the entrance to the palace area on the north facade, and built the grand staircase of the palace itself (1793), just as it is today. The rest of Villanueva’s works at San Lorenzo will be discussed later on in this book, as well as the Lonja building and other features outside the *quadro*.

In brief, a work of so vast a scope demanded an effort which was summed up thus by Fray Antonio de Villacastín in a letter to Lhermite about the work executed up to 1600: “in this period six and a half million [ducats] were spent on the construction for the host of skilled workers and labourers and wagons engaged upon it, some years more and some less, for the building was large and sumptuous and carefully worked, according to the plans of the Roman buildings, and there were years when 1500 skilled workers and a similar number of labourers worked every day, and 300 ox and mule carts...”

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The remains of the monarch were placed in the crypt beneath the high altar, but here, too, much remained to be done to achieve the desired image. This was to be undertaken during the reign of Philip IV, with the Italian Juan Bautista Crescenzi in charge of the project and construction (1617-1635) and with the intervention of the Spaniards Fray Nicolás de Madrid, Alonso Carbonell and Bartolomé de Zumbigo (1654), so that between them all they overcame the set of major difficulties posed by the undertaking. The final result, just as we see it today, also boasted its praise-filled chronicle, this time by Fray Francisco de los Santos, who left us a *Descripción Breve del Monasterio de S. Lorenzo* (1657), not so brief and with a wealth of fascinating details about what he called the monastery's crown, that is the Royal Chapel of the Pantheon.

Apart from the odd piece of work, such as that carried out in the sacristy, nothing new of note was done in the interior of the monastery until the 18th century, when under the reign of Charles IV Juan de Villanueva was commissioned to renovate the entrance to the palace area on the north facade, and built the grand staircase of the palace itself (1793), just as it is today. The rest of Villanueva's works at San Lorenzo will be discussed later on in this book, as well as the Lonja building and other features outside the *quadro*.

In brief, a work of so vast a scope demanded an effort which was summed up thus by Fray Antonio de Villacastín in a letter to Lhermite about the work executed up to 1600: "in this period six and a half million [ducats] were spent on the construction for the host of skilled workers and labourers and wagons engaged upon it, some years more and some less, for the building was large and sumptuous and carefully worked, according to the plans of the Roman buildings, and there were years when 1500 skilled workers and a similar number of labourers worked every day, and 300 ox and mule carts..."

DESCRIPTION OF THE “QUADRO”

“The whole is divided into three main parts, which occupy the interior of the Quadro, of such admirable proportions that any one of them alone would be enough to reflect the most powerful Monarchy....”

(Fray Francisco de los Santos, 1657)

The three parts always known as the *quadro*, in reference to the rectangular area measuring seven hundred and forty feet by five hundred and seventy (207×161 metres) on which the monastic complex was to be built, are best seen from the main west facade, where the three entrances indicate its tripartite layout. There are three axes: the central one comprises the Kings’ Courtyard, the church and the King’s apartments or private palace; the second, to the south, includes the monastery itself; finally the third, in the northern part, belongs to the school and the palace. With the help of a ground plan we can have a more accurate idea of the general layout of the monastery; its geometric format is closely linked to the old tradition of spaces structured around courtyards. The final gridiron-shaped image is not so much the result of a long medieval monastic experience as the rational approach which stemmed from contemporary civil buildings, like the famous hospitals of the Catholic Kings’ period.

Despite the rigid control the construction underwent, and contrary to the preconceived idea that everything in a monastery is equal and perfect, as a result of absolute respect for what we would call symmetric layout and constant formal balance, this is only an appearance. In fact there are many elements which imperceptibly break the rule. As a result the building is not monotonous because a balance is struck between uniformity and variety, and because of its incomplete

perfection, a spirit always shared by great buildings and great artists. It is something which distinguishes a mere exercise in mechanical perfection from a work of standard appearance with hidden blemishes. Paul Valéry wrote about the attractive secret of confidential imperfection. We mention this because a thorough tour of the monastery, from its facades through to the Sanctum Sanctorum, would reveal this constant, sometimes enigmatic, beauty of the discontinuity which makes the building even more fascinating. It is the human result of a project undertaken with an artist’s soul.

None of this can be appreciated at a distance: we see the orderly volumes as model organisation, with a tower in each of the four corners, so that the idea of the *quadro* is also clearly seen in the elevation. The bulk of the church with its formidable dome rises up to dominate over the whole, with the two bell towers at some distance. Galleries which intersect at right angles creating small and large courtyards; disciplined Flemish-style steep slate roofs; spires on the corner towers; slate roofs also over the rooms of the monastery and the school; the higher roof of the main staircase in the Evangelists’ Courtyard and the library gallery on the main facade, all give a perfect harmony to the whole when seen from above, like a courteous expression of the very constancy and energy of the disciplined character of that absolute monarch.

Closer to, it will be evident that from the facades to the uneven distribution of the chimneys on the roof-

tops, there are many nuances, subtly incorporated, which we should be watchful of so as not to fall into the hasty cliché of regarding the San Lorenzo monastery as critics from the last century did, writing of its monotony. In *Viaje por España* (1840) Teófilo Gautier wrote "I can only consider the Escorial as the saddest and most tedious monument that could be imagined.... There is nothing more monotonous than the sight of this pile of six or seven floors, with no mouldings, no pilasters, no columns just a honeycomb of flattened tiny windows..." Many more people, including historians, art critics, writers or ordinary travellers shared the derogatory interpretation which Carl Justi took upon himself to spread, through the famous text which appeared in Baedeker's excellent guide *Espagne et Portugal*, the French edition (Leipzig, 1908). Amongst other things it says: "A strictly geometric plan was imposed on the complex, and in its execution a style praised by contemporaries for its noble simplicity and by admirers for its majesty, but which today can only be seen as repulsively arid."

These and other points of view, which as in the case of Gautier and Justi belong to very different aesthetic creeds, not to mention the shadow cast by the Black Legend which weighs down on El Escorial, inevitably form part of the image and interpretation of the monastery through the course of history. These forewarnings tend to damage in advance our own view of the building and Philip's spirit, to an extent that it is worth reading other writers as well, not specialists in history or art, but the more sensitive poets or philosophers who scrutinize the secret corners of the soul and objects, and who, like Unamuno, value precisely that cornerstone of our history and architecture which others reject.

Echoing this apriorism with which El Escorial is usually seen, a building which in his view every Spaniard ought to visit at least once in their life, like a Mecca to Moslems, Unamuno writes in *Andanzas y visiones españolas*: "Hardly anyone arrives at El Escorial with an unprepared and serene mind, to be impressed by a work of art, to enjoy contemplating the

bare architecture in pure, rare enjoyment. Nearly everyone who goes to see El Escorial, goes blinkered, with political or religious prejudices in one sense or the other; more than pilgrims of art they go as progressive thinkers or as traditionalists, as Catholics or as free-thinkers. They go in search of Philip II's shadow, ill-famed and even less understood, and if they do not find it they pretend they have." Later on he insists on the beauty of the uncluttered style: "There is nothing like the charm of bare architecture.... Arriving at El Escorial from this bejewelled and to a large extent overly ornate Salamanca, the majority of whose buildings certainly cannot be accused of simplicity and severity, but rather of being overladen with foliage, my vision would rest on the pure, severe lines of the Monastery of El Escorial, that imposing mass; all proportion and grandeur without laboriousness".

Like pilgrims of art, then, we see the most significant aspects of the monastery starting with its four unequal facades, the main one being the west side with the three axes mentioned earlier; the southern one with all the cells' windows in it, looking over the Friars' Garden; the east side dominated by the head of the church, with Philip II's modest palace below; and finally the north side with two entrances to the Palace and a way in to the school. The towers, known as the Apothecary or Infirmary and the Prior's, both flank the south facade, while those on the north side, from the left to the right as well, are known as the Ladies' Tower and the North or the Cierzo (north wind) Tower.

The four facades of the monastery are in fact different from each other, showing different spaces and rhythm according to their orientation and purpose. So the most porous is the Friars' side, on the south, and the most opaque is the northern one. The spirit of Juan Bautista is best remembered in the south facade with its numerous windows that light up the cells, and the eastern one, while the other two show Herrera's touch. In the last two it is worth pointing out the triple entrance and the greater emphasis naturally put on the main axis, with a strong composition of superimposed Doric and Ionic orders, which punc-

tuate the greater height of this central body housing the library. It stretches like a bridge between the monastery and the school, symbolically connecting Faith and Knowledge, while reminding us of the importance of libraries in the overall make-up of monastic buildings in the Middle Ages. The universities and colleges of our Renaissance (Salamanca, Alcalá de Henares, Santa Cruz de Valladolid, etc.) had also placed their libraries across the main facade, over the entrance, with a degree of Humanist pride.

Going through the main entrance and the vestibule below the library, one reaches the Kings' Courtyard named after the Old Testament kings, statues of which crown the entrance to the church. The next chapter is devoted to the importance of the church and its inseparable connection with the King's modest dwelling embedded in the church wall. So we return to this simple courtyard, which in Juan Bautista's initial plan had an arcade around the sides, and here observe the collection of windows which illuminate the formidable room which is the library, entirely the work of Juan de Herrera and one of the last features to be designed and included in the final project.

Herrera's work was not limited to the architectural aspects of the library, its spatial definition or the best ways of using natural light, but also covered suitably equipping the main room with cupboards and shelving, which hold an outstanding bibliographic collection. In this double sense, as a vessel and its contents, the San Lorenzo library competes with and rivals the other three most important libraries of the sixteenth century, that of the Vatican in Rome, the Laurenciana in Florence and the Marciana in Venice. A jewel in the finest Renaissance taste, El Escorial's library has a main room measuring over fifty metres long by nine metres wide and a barrel vaulted ceiling with ten metre high windows. It has openings on to the Lonja, in the main facade of the monastery, and on to the Kings' Courtyard looking towards the church. Between these openings are cupboards with shelving designed by Herrera, where the books were carefully stored in an orderly

way and duly catalogued by the oft-mentioned Fray José de Sigüenza, who had been preceded as librarian by Fray Juan de San Jerónimo, also mentioned earlier, and Arias Montano. It seems that Sigüenza was responsible for the iconography in the frescoes on the walls and ceiling painted by Pellegrino Tibaldi and Bartolomé Carducho in the style and spirit of Michelangelo's work in the Sistine Chapel. Nevertheless we know that the architect himself, Juan de Herrera, also intervened in this programme with its double meaning, the hidden and the apparent, judging by amongst other things, the notes signed by him on one of Tibaldi's drawings relating to a section of the ceiling in which *Grammar* is represented, now housed in the British Museum. Sigüenza even wrote in his history of the monastery that the meaning of some of these paintings "was symbolic of another greater secret".

The representation of Theology, on the wall adjoining the monastery and Philosophy over the entrance leading to the school, polarizes the variegated series of emblems, stories and characters which give the erudite and sometimes mysterious meaning to this huge piece. It lies under the watchful gaze of the seven liberal arts (Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectic, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astrology) painted on the ceiling. In addition on the upper part of the walls, above the shelving, are impenetrable scenes such as *The Egyptian Priests* or *The Gymnosophists*. Pellegrino Tibaldi completed his work in 1591 when the other Italians Garnello and Castello had finished their beautiful decorative work in the grotesque style.

The fine carpentry work of the shelving, in the classic Roman Doric style so loved by Herrera, was done by Jusepe Flecha, who also worked on the choir stalls assisted by Gamboa and Serrano. The beauty of the wood, the textures and colours, can hardly be bettered; Sigüenza was to describe them as follows: "the material used and the way these shelves are made is sheer beauty; the most ordinary being walnut and the rest brought from the Indies: two kinds of mahogany, known as male and female, Brazil red, more toned down. Bully tree wood in a dark, chestnut colour,

though glowing and nobler, as if it were covered in blood. Ebony, cedar, orange, terebinth....”

In the centre of the room, on the beautiful marble floor are various tables made of marble, jasper and bronze, from the Prudent King's time, to which Philip IV added two grand porphyry pedestal tables which with the armillary sphere constructed in Florence (1585) make the *spine* of the library. With a lot of space for printed books in this room, a smaller room above the main one was fitted out, and in the nineteenth century manuscripts were taken to an area adjacent to the monastery, the former clothier's, also with windows giving on to the Kings' Courtyard. It is impossible to ponder on the history of this library's formation, one of the largest stores of knowledge that man was able to achieve in the sixteenth century, where along with Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arab, Turkish, Persian, Armenian, Chinese, Italian, German manuscripts and others, were also the Cantigas de Santa María of Alfonso el Sabio, the Emilian manuscript, Isabel la Católica's book of hours, the Koran of Muley Zidán, Arias Montano's Bible in Hebrew, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza's entire library, an extraordinary collection of incunabula like St Augustine's *Civitas Dei* (Rome, 1468) and so on.

Behind all this, apart from the royal will, we should be aware of the many advisers Philip II depended on in this area. The humanist group made up of Honorato Juan, Páez de Castro, Antonio Agustín, Ambrosio de Morales, and in particular Benito Arias Montano—the librarian between San Jerónimo and Sigüenza—were the most directly involved in the search and acquisition of books, manuscripts and other bibliographic treasures, in the known world, where according to Fray Jerónimo Román, “there is some old trace of having had books”. The first books to arrive at the Escorial in 1565 amounted to around fifty, but after three years there were over a thousand, and when an inventory was drawn up in 1576 it came to over four thousand five hundred volumes. The contents and interest in the library continued to grow for the rest of the sixteenth century and part of the seventeenth century, until it comprised tens of thousands

of manuscripts and printed works. The collection suffered its first major blow with the fire in the monastery in 1671. There was also a *scriptorium* in the library, where thousands of manuscript copies were made, texts, mostly liturgical ones, were illuminated, and a wide range of works were bound.

As would be expected the monastery buildings included a *domus sacerdotum*, that is a house for the men devoted to God, the monks, as a guarantee of the continuity and permanence of Philip's project. This area represents almost a third of the total ground area, the southernmost part. It has its own entrance in the main facade, although paradoxically this leads principally to the kitchens, stores and canteens, while the elegant entrance to the monastic area was from the gatehouse or the “room of secrets”, which opened on to the narthex, or hallway, to the church, under the southern tower of its facade. Inside one reaches a “large hall which serves as a reception or conversation room”, with walnut seats for the visitors. In fact it is a waiting room which gives access to the large cloister or the Evangelists' Courtyard and the small or gatehouse cloister. The latter is one of the four small cloisters which open between the arms of the Greek cross, made up of four large rooms, the former clothier's, the kitchen, the refectory and the lavatories, all of which centre around a point which like a very high lantern rises high above the roofs of these rooms to ensure the light reaches this kind of hallway.

In its turn this cross is placed within a square which houses the monks' cells on the south side; various rooms on the side which corresponds to the gallery of the main facade like the apothecary, which lends its name to the corner tower here and the adjoining cloister, the refectory of the sick and administrative rooms which explain why the small cloister is known as the procuratory; the hospice, more administrative rooms and cells on the north side; and finally, on the east side the wide gallery which includes the reception room, the large staircase opening on to the big cloister and the primitive chapel or borrowed church used for worship while the monastery church

was being finished, and where Philip II and his parents were buried until the Royal Pantheon was completed in the seventeenth century. These courtyards or cloisters, with three levels of arches, on to which the novices' bedrooms open on the upper level, have a fountain in the centre, like the one we referred to as a large lantern, in a plain, restrained style perfectly in keeping with the austerity of the order.

In contrast the large or processional cloister, known as the Evangelists' Courtyard because of the four sculptures by Juan Bautista Monegro which represent them in the central pavilion, is an exquisite work of rich Italianate architecture. This masterpiece of Juan Bautista de Toledo is worthy of being in Rome alongside the best works of the period. The Roman Doric order on the ground floor and Ionic on the upper floor lend it a quite extraordinary air of monumental classicism. Later Juan de Herrera designed the famous domed pavilion in the centre, in a Roman exercise drawn from the work of Bramante, along the lines of San Pietro in Montorio. Without doubt the legacy of monastic tradition, which in the Hieronymite order had a good precedent in the large cloister at Guadalupe, this pavilion forms the centre of the layout of the geometrical garden, distributed in a grid-pattern with flower beds which supply the house of God and the King. Four ponds for irrigation are at the Evangelists' feet, forming part of the whole picture and completing this *paradise* praised by Sigüenza who it is said was also the inspiration behind the final result of this courtyard.

Apart from the fine architecture in the Evangelists' Courtyard, the pictorial decorations in its corridors and some of the main rooms, like the Sacristy, the prior's cell in the corner of the tower, the Chapterhouses and the outstanding staircase all merit due consideration. The paintings of the lower cloister are mostly the work of Pellegrino Tibaldi, mentioned earlier: in these pieces he developed the theme of the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary. The pictorial vision and the approach to these frescoes, limiting them to the stretches of wall which echo the arches of the court-

yard, clearly correspond to a Counter-reformist mannerism in the style of Michelangelo. However Tibaldi, known in his country as "a reformed Michelangelo", inspired by engravings of different origins, was more skilled in landscapes and beautiful architectural backgrounds than in the figures themselves. The cool colour tones are well suited to the nature of the cloisters, with the blues, greens and yellows predominating. The Italian painter Romolo Cincinnato and the Spanish Luis de Carvajal and Miguel Barroso were also involved in these frescoes, which have since been retouched and restored often. Together with Tibaldi, they also painted the *stations*, in oil on panel, which are the triptychs found at the beginning and the end of each corridor, providing a visual background to the monks in their solemn processions around the cloister. The Florentine Cincinnato was commissioned to paint the Martyrdom of Saint Maurice to replace the famous painting of the same title by El Greco which Philip II had rejected. Cincinnato's version is in the church and El Greco's in the Escorial's collection, making it possible for us to compare the different excellence of each.

One can enter the church from the cloister through the Processional door on the north side, a reminder of the extensive use made of the cloister from the Temple on important feast-days, and that it leads to the antesacristy, and on to the main sacristy, somewhat distanced from the church because of the royal apartments being positioned next to the chancel; it is unusual in monastic architecture to find the sacristy in the east side of the cloister. The sacristy is a large room, some thirty metres long, with a vaulted ceiling displaying frescoes painted by the Genoese artists Niccolò Granello and Frabizio Castello, son and stepson respectively of Bergamasco, who worked in this part of the monastery around 1583-1584. The style is essentially decorative, based on *candelieri* themes, caissons, traces of diamonds, emeralds and rubies, borders, grotesque work, all of which give a rich, splendid atmosphere to the room. A large wardrobe for the liturgical vestments runs down the west side,

opposite the windows, while on the wall an excellent altarpiece presides over the room. Made during Charles II's reign, it includes a painting by Claudio Coello depicting Charles II worshipping the Holy Form. This was an ancient relic that had been defiled and recovered by Philip II which Charles II then brought here, which was the motivation behind the altarpiece. Designed by José del Olmo, it contains bronzes by Francesco Filipini. This famous painting, featuring a range of portraits from the monarch and nobles (Dukes of Alba, Pastrana, Medinaceli etc.) to the Hieronymite monks (Fray Francisco de los Santos and others) and even the painter himself, also reflects the room of the sacristy with a masterly effect of perspective and light. It also acts as a backdrop for showing the relic, thus completing the baroque concept of this work, accompanied by a fine gilded bronze crucifix by Pietro Tacca, as well as a small, very beautiful niche behind. An inscription on the altarpiece sums up well this unusual work: "Here is the Miracle of a grand work, consecrated within the Wonder of the World, the Miracle of the Heavens".

In a style very similar to their work in the sacristy, Granello and Castello also painted the vaulted ceilings of the Chapterhouses (1585), assisted by another Italian, Francesco da Urbino. Situated on the southern corridor of the Evangelists' Courtyard, they are entered from a hallway, leaving the vicarial room to the right and the prior's room to the left. The latter communicates with the prior's lower cell in the lower part of the tower which bears his name. Both the sacristy and the Chapterhouses have a fine collection of paintings on their walls, the pieces and their masters (Van der Weyden, El Greco, Ribera and more) being too numerous to detail here, but which are the result of the patronage given by Spanish monarchs to artists throughout history.

Finally on the east side of the Evangelists' Courtyard, between the church and the parlour, is the colossal main staircase, which is attributed by Sigüenza to Bergamasco, later modified and developed by Juan de Herrera. It is the culmination of the rich Spanish tra-

dition of Renaissance staircases, which starts from the ground in one broad sweep and then divides into two at a half-way landing. It is quite monumental, though without forgetting its functional purpose of connecting the two levels of the Evangelists' Courtyard with the three floors of the monastery part of the cloister. Going up this magnificent staircase one finds discreet doorways which lead into the three levels of the monastery, thus linking the more solemn, monumental part with the modest, domestic area.

The grand staircase is exceptionally high, and has an individual-shaped roof, which distinguishes it from the overall panorama of roof-tops in the monastery. In the seventeenth century the Neopolitan Luca Giordano, an excellent fresco painter, painted its ceiling, having been summoned to Spain by King Charles II to complete painting work that had been left unfinished since the days of Philip II. Giordano did extraordinary work in the no less extraordinary space of seven months, so that by the spring of 1693 it was considered finished and the artist went on to work on the paintings of the church. Luca Giordano worked on the staircase to great effect, with his characteristic, intuitive skill, using rapid, free brush-strokes—he was known as *Luca fa presto* in his time. He worked on a central theme of the Exaltation of the Catholic Monarchy of Spain, ranging from the Trinity to portraits of Charles II and his family, including a host of saints, virtues, allegories and musical angels, all in a baroque concierto of clouds and groups flying over the great void of the staircase, which is given colour and light badly needed amidst the cold granite. By way of a frieze, Giordano painted a battle of San Quintín and a lengthy scene depicting the construction of the monastery. All this colour and movement is in lively contrast to the more static style of Tibaldi and Luca Cambiaso, in the stretches of staircase they painted with various evangelical themes.

Finally, what remains is the *third* of the complex taken up by the school and the palace, in the northern part, the purpose and use of which is obviously less monasterial. The school has two entrances, the

larger one in the main facade acting as a counterpoint to the one in the monastery, and another service entrance on the north facade. The school's layout is similar to the monastery's, in as much as it is formed by two galleries which intersect in the middle, making a cross-shape with four courtyards. However it differs in its final distribution, for example one of the courtyards is replaced by the kitchens. There is a central hallway opening into the four limbs: the ground floor consists of the kitchen to the north, the students' refectory to the east, the covered walkway to the south, now converted into a meeting room, and to the west, larder, boiler-room and utility room. The northernmost courtyard is known as the Seminary's Courtyard as it is next to the refectory and the Grammar classroom, forming a corner with the North Tower, while the other two courtyards are the School's on either side of the two-tiered walkway. Unfortunately its openings are today walled up so the monastery has lost one of its most evocative spatial features. An eighteenth century painting on canvas covers the flat ceiling of this central hall which Sigüenza named the school's market because of its open-air characteristic. On the south side of this square which encloses the cross-shaped layout, are the Theology and Arts classrooms, illuminated from the Kings' courtyard. Also of interest is the dormitory of the seminary on the upper floor of the north gallery, which is a long room, contrasting with the individual rooms of the monks.

The palace area occupies the north-eastern quarter of the monastery, and here the symmetry seen up to now is broken. It is more like the Evangelists' Courtyard, where different functions and uses interrupt the balanced geometry of the plan. So the new division gave rise to a large courtyard, the palace's, and two smaller ones around which the entrance and kitchens were situated. These are what the visitor can see today after coming into the monastery through the main door on the north facade. The Royal Courtyard, which catches rain water in two cisterns beneath the ground, has truly palatial interior walls, with an arcade on the ground floor and an elegant first floor with balconies.

All this area was altered in the eighteenth century during the reigns of Charles III and Charles IV, with new building and decorative work, changing the sober character given to it by Philip II. The north wing of the courtyard was to have accommodated ambassadors, appearing in Herrera's designs as the Knights' apartments, while the eastern gallery, between the Ladies' Tower and the body of the church, was kept for royal apartments, generally known as the Queen's Room, relegating the King's private rooms to the nucleus around the Courtyard of the Mascarones behind the head of the temple.

These reforms show the talent of the architect Juan de Villanueva who from 1781 planned and supervised the work done in the monastery, learning from the masterly example set by Herrera and harmonising with his work showing respect and originality. At this stage a new entrance was made, now known as the Coach Gate, which gave direct access to the Royal Courtyard, and to the main staircase, giving easier access than Herrera's former, more concealed one. The palace's elegant floor consists of a series of rooms, salons, boudoirs, lavatories, chambers, halls, an oratory and more, decorated in the finest eighteenth-century, romantic taste. Tapestries, paintings, furniture, clocks, ceilings, lamps and many more things reveal a rich and colourful courtly taste, the significance of which is a world apart from what the monastery meant to the Prudent King. The joyful, carefree style of the tapestries taken from sketches of Goya and Bayeu are an indication of this contrast.

Finally there is a large room giving on to this Royal Courtyard on the first floor to the south, known as the Hall of Battles but named the Private Royal Gallery by Herrera. It consists of a very long room, the largest in the monastery, with a vaulted ceiling. Its original purpose is unknown, although there is every possibility it was intended as a protocol room. However a great deal of doubt still surrounds it. It has come to be known as the Hall or Gallery of Battles because of the pictorial representation of various episodes in the Battle of Higuera (1431), the Battle of San Quin-

tín, and other epic naval battles, seen on the fifty-five metre long wall, on the gallery walls and the balcony panels. They were painted by the Genoese group, Niccolò Granello, Lazzaro Tavarone, Fabrizio Castello and Orazio Cambiaso between 1585 and 1589. Their narrative style, going into many details of the armaments, machines, boats, clothing, army formations, armour, carts and so on, and the scale used, link these paintings with the precious style of miniature art. This same team of painters had decorated the white ceiling of this gallery between 1584 and 1585, with grotesque motifs in a delicate almost Pompeian style, once again with an extraordinary purity, underlining boundaries and outlining fields with fine lines of deep blue and olive green.

We have left any mention of the King's House to the end: it should be called the private palace, with no access from the outside, hidden away, hardly visible from the outside, as if his real palace were the monastery itself, in which the monarch would just occupy the first cell, the most privileged one, closest to the altar. In reality this was the case, the king behaving in a strangely modest way hardly fitting for a monarch who was feared for his power in the land. From the very start, Juan Bautista de Toledo's master plan had provided for the King's apartments to be in their present situation, embracing the church wall and on two floors around the Courtyard of Mascarones. Jehan Lhermite described Philip II's apartments in this way (1597): "His rooms are situated behind the high altar...with one apartment below and another above—for the summer and winter respectively—gaining access to them from a small door in the palace's main

courtyard...which comes out into a long corridor, full of turns and quite dark. The first chamber is the place where those coming and going wait; the second is for ordinary audiences, and the third is a splendid drawing room, where His Majesty liked to walk with his children at sunset....The fourth room is where His Majesty usually ate, with excellent perspectives of gardens hanging all around the walls, as well as plants, herbs and flowers from the Indies.....and further on is the way into His Majesty's bedroom...". These were the rooms which the King was to permanently live in from 1586, where he made it evident that his modest home was a place for personal isolation, almost what the Carthusians and Hieronymites called a *desert* in the sense of a quiet, sought-after solitude, accompanied by nature which he could enjoy from his rooms, as if from a secret belvedere. Lhermite's account also refers to the King sitting in an articulated chair "to contemplate the beautiful countryside" from his rooms.

When he was not looking out he would retire to his oratory that opened on to the chancel of the church, in the same way as Charles V had done in the monastery of Yuste, so that along with the altar he could see his parents' cenotaph opposite, on "the good side", that is the Gospel side, but that leads us on to the church which will be dealt with in the next chapter. We should just add that these private rooms of the King, looking to the east and south, had their counterpart in another series of rooms, similarly distributed on the north side. Known as the Queen's rooms they were occupied by the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia. They also have a private oratory looking on to the chancel of the church.

temple in which there was a *domus sacerdotum*, the *domus regia* and the *domus Domini* or house of the Lord; that is the temple itself which together with the houses of the King and the Priests, certainly has analogies with the layout of El Escorial. The possibility also of finding parallels between the significance of one building and the other fed the Solomonic scope of El Escorial. It remains for us to look at this last piece of the *quadro*, the temple itself.

The facade of the church is the first feature which makes us think about the Solomonic connection when, after admiring its noble architecture flanked by two towers and considering the classical Roman Doric order of its portico, we notice six monumental figures representing various kings of Judah, the work of Juan Bautista Monegro; in the centre are David and Solomon with the following inscriptions on their respective pedestals: *Operis exemplar a Domino recepit* (Received the model of the Temple from the Lord) and *Templum Domino aedificatum dedicavit* (The Temple built is dedicated to the Lord). This project proposed by Arias Montano is completed with the statues of Ezekiel, Josiah, Josaphat and Manasseh.

In this part of the facade, which as has been said acts as a distributor with the entrances to the monastery and the school to the right and left, are two inscriptions on black marble which, after recording Philip II as King of all Spain, the two Sicilies and Jerusalem, cites the date the Temple was begun in 1563, the first celebration of a holy service "on the eve of Saint Lawrence in the year 1586", and the desire of the monarch "full of piety and devotion" that "it should be consecrated with holy chrism by Camilo Cayetano, Patriarch of Alexandria, Nuncio, on the 30th day of August 1595". In other words, after David, Solomon and the other Kings of Judah, the mention of Philip II in the portico leaves no doubt about El Escorial's biblical emulation. It is apposite that this be called 'The Kings' Courtyard'.

This also suggests quite clearly the royal nature of the temple as something different from the simply

monastic or parochial. It is most certainly the *domus Domini* but with a courtly purpose which makes it different. This is where its secret lies, in this dual character which allowed the King to live close to the altar and be present at services from the back of the choir without losing his kingly status, where the religious liturgy had an element of courtly etiquette, where every area of the temple recognises the different status of the individual, all under the supervision of a prior but also a king, the Rex-Sacerdos.

Regardless of the church's artistic merits, it is mainly an extraordinary architectural work which verges on perfection. Its ground plan and interior elevations reflect a maturity which show Herrera to have been a brilliant architect, not overlooking the talents of Juan Bautista de Toledo. Its outstanding features include: the volumes, the general distribution, the routes around it and the way of linking up on different levels with other parts of the monastery, the organisation of the choir stalls at the foot of the church, the measured elevation of the chancel, the monumental solution for internally articulating the elevations of the walls and pillars, the sustained proportion of all the architectural elements, the way of introducing into this the altars, organs and other vital elements of the liturgy, the visual axes, the light and the acoustics. All of these and more make this temple one of the most outstanding stories in the history of architecture.

The project itself has Roman origins: it is an exercise in composition, seeking a ground plan which while retaining a traditional essence could incorporate its own new values stemming from the Renaissance vision of an ideal temple. So what emerged was a ground plan that is basically centralised, formed by a Greek cross inserted into a square, with a dome raised over the central point of the cross, but to which is added a chapel at its head and choir stalls at its feet, both outside the square format. This allows the symmetrical organisation on the main axis to be kept, though not on the secondary transverse axis. Finally, there are constant reminders in this temple of the planning process between Bramante and Michelangelo in

St Peter's in the Vatican in Rome; this temple quietly emulated its Counter-reformist architecture.

As well as the beauty of the architecture, whose bare granite and restrained decoration make an impression that is not easily forgotten, where we find the first great Renaissance dome with its tambour, and lantern to be built in Spain, the church was appointed in a privileged way with its high altar, a sacarium, the royal tombs, the other altars and relics, the choir stalls and a rich collection of frescoes on the ceilings, as well as the organs and many other elements which are impossible to detail here, like for example the liturgical vestments, the chalices, the extraordinary collection of reliquaries and hymnbooks. These were an additional, generous donation from the King with a view to making the different forms of worship richer and more solemn, whether it be of the saints, the veneration of relics, chanting of the devotions, the liturgy of mass, or anything else that in the spirit of Trent would be expected of that King "full of piety and devotion" as the inscription in the portico of the church announced.

The high altar retable covers the back of the church, making a quite extraordinary architectural, sculptural and pictorial feature which had nothing to match it in the European art of its time. Only Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine chapel could be compared with this piece, which is the work of Juan de Herrera. In both cases the religious environment is seen as a formidable vehicle, of human support in the case of Michelangelo and of strong architecture in Juan de Herrera's case. In the El Escorial church a strict, hierarchical division of streets and bodies has taken precedence, reminiscent of the traditional Spanish retables, although subjected to a formal purity and a study of proportions which make it seem like a perfect, calculated work though never cold. Previous experiences have come together in this work and at the same time it indicates the end of Renaissance-style retables, which were not to undergo notable changes until the experimentation of José Benito Churriguera in San Esteban in Salamanca. The imposition of one

register over another, going from Roman Doric to Corinthian, in the most beautiful red and green jasper with gilt touches in the base, capitals and triglyphs, frames a series of canvases and sculptures by Italian artists including Jacopo da Trezzo, who was responsible for the beautiful tabernacle in the lower part of the retable.

The contract for its construction was signed in January 1579 and the last sculptures were put into place in September 1590, in other words just over ten years, during which time architect, sculptors, painters, stonemasons and gilders contributed to the erection of this formidable retable, which if it had been any larger would have been alongside the royal tombs. The tabernacle plays an important part in the retable; not only does it contain the monstrance, but in addition it creates an unusual light effect, of something divine but real, thanks to an opening in the altar, which is not visible from inside the church, which allows it to catch the light from the Courtyard of Mascarones. Incidentally the monstrance's original shrine was looted by the French in 1808. This is in fact a lighting effect, seen against the light, which was to be used later for niches and the transparent baroque features of the Hispanic world, although here it is used with an exquisite subtlety, a far cry from the theatrical style of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Being in El Escorial this device seems somehow quite natural. Many visitors to the monastery, dazzled by its material content, the beauty of the images, the striking artificial light which illuminates the retable, go away without having seen what Philip II used to contemplate from his rooms, or what the Hieronymite community would see from the choir, that is the architecture with its own light and shade, and with all the effects which as we said were not merely due to chance, but were thought out and planned at the time of building.

This measured path of light passes through the sacarium or niche, that is the small space found behind the altar which from the chancel and the two open doors in the base of the retable, give access to

some stairs which lead up to the level of the monstrance; the light hits the back of the monstrance highlighting its presence with a halo. Some frescoes painted by Tibaldi represent various stories from the Old Testament which anticipated the spiritual food of the Eucharist, such as The Manna from Heaven or The Paschal Lamb. This takes place beneath a rainbow which in an angelic way accompanies the narrow ceiling which covers the niche. Tibaldi's paintings, the first he did in El Escorial on his arrival from Italy, pleased Philip II so much that they prompted the monarch to commission him to do the work in the Library and the cloister in the Evangelists' Courtyard as mentioned earlier.

The tabernacle was made in Madrid by Jacopo da Trezzo assisted by Juan Bautista Comane, a marble piece but worked as if by a goldsmith judging by the delicate way it was handled. On either side of it are two more Tibaldi paintings, both *Adorations*, one of the Shepherds and the other of the Magi. On the same level are the praying groups of Charles V and Philip II, in a position of perpetual worship. This is an important detail to notice exemplifying how the work carried out in the chancel of the church went beyond simply appointing the space with liturgical furnishings. On the contrary it is all inter-related: the altar with the funerary groups, these in turn with the pantheon beneath the altar, that with Philip II's rooms, and so on. So to fully understand one cannot just sum up the isolated units. Tibaldi was still to do a third painting for the high altar, *The Martyrdom of San Lorenzo*, which again revealed the influence of Michelangelo. The rest of the paintings with scenes from the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, Pentecost and The Ascension of Mary (1587) were done by Federico Zuccaro, with good technique but somewhat lacking in emotion.

A great deal of the retable's force and richness comes from the sculptural work, mostly done by Pompeo Leoni; he made smaller models of all the sculptures for the King to see and approve, before casting the final work in bronze in Milan. From there, where

Leone and Pompeo Leoni had their studio, the sculptures were taken to Genoa, shipped to Cartagena, then finally transported to El Escorial. This whole operation was highly delicate, and is an example of the enormity of the project of building El Escorial, the effort that went into it, the difficulties that had to be overcome, none of which should be overlooked.

There are fifteen large sculptures in total, in gilded bronze, which are distributed in pairs or groups as follows, starting at the bottom and moving up: the four Fathers of the Church; the four Evangelists, James the Elder and Saint Andrew; Saint Peter and Saint Paul; and finally, crowning the whole piece with the characteristic *spine* or central crest of the retable, the scene of Christ on the cross with the Virgin Mary and Saint John on either side. Some of Pompeo Leoni's sanguine drawings for the latter two sculptures are kept in the Uffizi in Florence. It is a masterly grouping of pure Italian art, indescribably perfect and noble in its expressions and attitudes. Philip II's quiet intention to choose this style for himself and his secretaries soon became evident; it is quite different from the Spanish sculptural tradition, in which the polychromatic wood expressed our most authentic art, but one which did not easily fit into the overall concept of El Escorial. The sculptures increase in size as they go up the retable, so that the largest are at the top, avoiding the opposite effect.

Pompeo Leoni was also commissioned for the funerary groups of Charles V and Philip II followed by some members of their families at prayer, which flank the retable on either side of the chancel, each one below its own, splendid coat of arms. The architecture which contains them seems to be from the retable, the same style, the same materials and colours. Also the sculptures in gilded bronze seem to belong to the same world, as if the intention had been to make some identification between saints and kings: "Saints and kings are at rest in this church, or to put it better, all saints and all kings. Because a saint reigns with God and the King who serves him is a saint". So wrote Antonio Gracián, Philip II's private secretary, about that

desire to participate in the divine from the royalty of power, helping us to correctly interpret this complex situation. No words can evoke the beauty and contained emotion, nor the majesty that is enclosed in these funerary figures, which paradoxically show the individuals in life, in a devout kneeling position, though King and Emperor do not for a moment lose their nobility and composure. Although we have a long Spanish tradition in funerary sculptures, never had there been a chance like this to prepare for the funeral service. Conceived like this, the chancel converted a monastic church into a monumental funeral chapel, as Osten Sacken pointed out, relegating the planned underground church into simply being a Royal Pantheon, which was what it finally became in the seventeenth century.

The funerary groups made in Madrid stand on three doors which lead to the King's rooms and the way to the Sacristy (the Epistle side, beneath Philip II and his family) and to the Queen's rooms (the Gospel side, beneath the group of Charles V and his family). The first sculptures to be finished were Charles V and the Empress Isabel of Portugal, their daughter María, and the Emperor's two sisters, Leonor of France and María of Hungary. Philip II was able to see this group in position from his rooms, in his last days, as they finally were placed on that 'good side', that is the Gospel side, in 1598, the year of the monarch's death. The group with Philip II, accompanied by the queens Ana, Isabel and María of Portugal, the latter being the King's first wife and mother of the Infante Charles who completes the group, was not put into position until 1600. One of the most striking and powerful features is the spatial silences which precede and follow these silent funerary groups, where the passage of time does not seem to have erased the heavy weight of the presence of the King and his father, the Emperor. Some meaningful inscriptions on black marble load the atmosphere even more and one can feel a shiver down the spine reading the invitation which translated from the Latin indicates that this empty space in front of the Emperor and the King is reserved in case "One of

Charles V's descendants surpasses the glory of his achievements, he should occupy this position first, and the rest hold back in reverence", while on the Epistle side it says that "This place which remains empty is kept by he who leaves it for any one of his descendants who be more virtuous; in no other case should it be occupied". In both cases the empty space behind was reserved for other descendants to pay "the natural debt of death". No-one excelled or dared to place themselves in front or behind of either funerary group.

We know that these so-called funerary groups are really only cenotaphs remembering those who are actually buried in the Royal Pantheon, beneath the high chancel. One of the last parts of the monastery to be built, it had a complicated history which is summed up in the inscription to be found as one begins to go down the stairs reached through a passage between the altar and the sacristy. Translated from the Latin it says: "To God, Omnipotent and Great. A holy place dedicated by the Austrias to the mortal remains of the Catholic Kings, who wait for the longed-for day of the Restoration of life, below the high altar. Charles V, the most illustrious of Caesars, desired this last place of rest for himself and for those of his lineage; Philip II, the most prudent of Kings, chose it; Philip III, a deeply pious prince, ordered the work to be begun; Philip IV, great for his mercy, steadfastness and religious devotion, extended, embellished and completed it in the year of Our Lord 1654".

Herrera's original plan was reconsidered by Juan Gómez de Mora, and later Juan Bautista Crescenzi for the decoration, without forgetting the parts played by Fray Nicolás de Madrid, Alonso Carbonell and Bartolomé de Zumbigo, responsible for its actual appearance, in particular the Pantheon's entrance door, the staircase, the flooring and the altar. In this long process what was envisaged as a funeral chapel or church, eventually became a pantheon, or rather a Royal Pantheon Chapel, as its chronicler Fray Francisco de los Santos put it. He left us a full account, not only of its architecture, including some interesting engravings of its ground plan and elevations, but also of the solemn

transfer of the monarchs' mortal remains to their final resting place. Its ground plan is octagonal, some ten metres across, with magnificent pilastered architecture in Corinthian style which creates separations for the different niches containing the Kings' urns, on the Gospel side, and the Queens' on the Epistle side, of the House of Austria and then the Bourbons. Rich marbles from Toledo and jaspers from Tortosa, with touches of gilded bronze, give it all due grandeur, which does not interfere in any way with what the monastery had been until then.

There were many problems which slowed down this part of the building, which furthermore was one of the objectives set out in the monastery's Foundational Charter. Problems of subterranean water, of lighting, of changing criteria about the form and function of this space, and many more, conditioned its completion date. Other adjoining areas, of complex yet interesting organisation and purpose such as the "pudrideros" (the rotting rooms) prolong this subterranean history; the Infantes' Pantheon came to occupy the floor beneath the sacristy, the Prior's Tower and the Chapter rooms. This Infantes' Pantheon was accommodated under these rooms between the reign of Isabel II (1862) and Alfonso XIII (1886), following the plan of José Segundo de Lema and Luis de Landecho, "to honour the venerable kinship and descent from the Kings, to inhume the remains of the Queen consorts who died without giving birth to Princes, and the Princes and Infantes". There, in this cold, unwonted atmosphere of white marble brought from Carrara, Florence, Bardiglio and Cuenca, is a series of tombs of members of the royal family, many of them modelled by Ponciano Ponzano and made in Italy by Jacopo Baratta in Carrara. Others were made by another Italian, Giuseppe Galleoti, including that of Juan de Austria, the victor of Lepanto. Thus the Italian influence in the building of El Escorial was continued.

The church of El Escorial not only accommodated the high altar in its chancel, but also another forty retables, each with its own altar used for the daily services of the Hieronymite fathers. All this was thought

out and planned in readiness for the increased number of masses the community was obliged to hold after the death of the founder. They are distributed all around the perimeter of the temple and the enormous pillars where there is a discreet arrangement of niches. An interesting point is that each of these retables contains a pair of saints, the work of Juan Navarrete "El Mudo", Alonso Sanchez Coello, Luis de Carvajal and Diego de Urbina; every one has its own personality, from the bold, monumental style of Navarrete to the preciousness of Sanchez Coello. The Italian artists also contributed to this series of "ordinary" retables, as they are known: Luca Cambiaso, Tibaldi and Cincinnato painted the larger scenes which are in the bigger retables in the side chapels. El Greco painted his famous Saint Maurice for one of these, although it was replaced by a painting with the same theme done by Romolo Cincinnato. The largest two retables of the series are found in the side aisles; they are known as the "Altars of the Relics" because of the large collection of relics seen inside them once the panels are opened. Constructed like triptychs, the fixed part contains shelves full of relics with their certification, while the doors are painted both inside and out, with scenes of The Annunciation (north aisle) and Saint Jerome the Penitent (south aisle), both being the first things to be painted by Federico Zuccaro in the monastery (1586).

The enormous amount of painting work which began in 1576, following a painstaking iconographic programme of true catholic, apostolic and Roman inspiration which justified the choice of each and every one of the saints represented, ran parallel with the decoration of the roof. Names mentioned before, such as Luca Cambiaso, were responsible for the *Coronation of the Virgin* (1584-1585); at the same time Luca Cambiaso along with Cincinnato, was painting the *Gloria* of the ceiling over the choir, as well as the upper part of its walls. Looking beyond the iconographic content, albeit very interesting, as painting none compare with the subsequent brilliant contribution of Luca Giordano on the rest of the church ceilings, which had remained blank since the sixteenth century. Here

one can see again that free, energetic talent of this Neapolitan painter with Venetian style; his airy, mobile clustered compositions, with flying volumes of colour and light, already commented on in connection with the main staircase of the Evangelists' Courtyard, once again show his exceptional, masterly skills, in the closing years of the seventeenth century.

As already mentioned the raised choir is to be found in the stretch at the foot of the church, as in the old Spanish monasteries, on a striking arrangement of stonework, the famous flat vaulting which was also the result of the accumulated building experience of our stonemasons. It contains magnificent choir stalls with one hundred and twenty-eight seats, laid out in an upper and lower choir, "where the monks are seriously and religiously, day and night, either singing or in silent prayer, so there is never a moment when they are not occupied" (Fray de los Santos). The stalls were also designed by Herrera in a strictly architectural Corinthian style, with no sign of the traditional carved backs, and made by Giuseppe Flecha using noble wood such as mahogany, bully tree wood, terebinth, cedar and boxwood, which he also used in the splendid lectern in the centre of the choir. The hymnbooks which were placed there had their own library in the two adjoining antechoirs, with ceilings also painted by Giordano; this extraordinary collection consisted

of two hundred and sixteen books which made it possible to "sing holy praises in the choir...in imitation of the noble angelic spirits" (Fray de los Santos). All that was needed was the support of the organs, eight in all, with a wide range of registers and voices, so that they "joyfully filled" the temple (Fray de los Santos). Four of them were small hand organs. Two others were positioned on the sides of the choir itself and two in the walls formed by the limbs of the cross shape of the temple. The organist Gilles Brevost and his sons collaborated in the construction of the latter two (1578-1586), ensuring the enveloping nature of the music with endless nuances. Any one who knows the El Escorial church only for its architecture, without the addition of voices or the full sound of all its organs, played today from a single console, is somehow looking at a beautiful violin without hearing its sound. I know of no instrument more powerful, subtle and highly tuned as the temple of El Escorial. I know no other case where Music and Architecture owe so much to each other. Here the liturgy can reach such heights of truly sublime beauty, the idea of which was forged in the mind of its founder, who in his final days came to enjoy this first step towards eternity. "It is not possible to do more on earth" wrote Fray Ginés de Sepúlveda, referring to the liturgical celebrations in the church of El Escorial.

OUTSIDE THE MONASTERY

“Friend, bear now some other small things adjacent to this great mass, and may the piece of building called the Compañía be the first, for as they say it accompanies the main building...”

(Antonio Ponz, 1787)

There are indeed many other buildings in the immediate vicinity of this great *mass* which stands on the *quadro*. Everything included therein is highly significant and strictly complies with what Philip II wished to build in this earthly version of the New Jerusalem. Everything fulfils a function in relation to the basic concepts of Divinity, Catholic Church and exemplary worship, of which the monarchy of Philip II becomes a generous but at the same time interested defender. All else had to be excluded from the precinct, occupying other buildings close by. Thus from the 16th to the 18th centuries the buildings were put up which form the corner of the north and west facades, the so-called Exchange (Lonja), while the south and east sides of the monastery continue to enjoy an unimpeded view of the adjacent gardens and orchard.

In this final phase of building, the direction of the work and even the actual design gradually passed into the hands of Francisco de Mora, “on account of the poor health of Juan de Herrera”, so that from December 1593 Mora was in charge of everything done there, naturally following Herrera’s criteria, having become conversant with the latter’s style since entering his service as assistant in 1579. Mora played a decisive part in the gardens and orchards, undoubtedly already conceived by Herrera to judge by the perspective of the Seventh Design, where the treatment that Herrera had thought out for the immediate vicinity

of the monastery is seen, although some aspects were to be modified. It is known that to build the *mass* the land had to be levelled to such an extent that a platform on the south and east sides was required to span the difference in level with the other two facades. On this body geometrical gardens were designed. The one that lies beneath the cells on the south facade was called the Friars’ Garden —used by Manuel Azaña in 1936 for the title of his book on El Escorial. The King’s Garden and the Queen’s Garden lie beneath the royal apartments to the right and left of the modest palace behind the head wall of the church, in a situation of palace and reserved garden very similar to that of the Royal Palace of Aranjuez. These private gardens of the monarchs are separated from each other by discreet stone walls, although there are communicating gates. Small niches with seats give these secluded spaces, today with trimmed box hedges and simple fountains, a pleasant scale, reflecting the special attraction Philip II always felt for gardens, from his first experiences at the Casa de Campo at Madrid to these more secluded ones of the Court.

The fact that the gardens were made on masonry soon favoured their comparison with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, as they are described by Fray Francisco de los Santos. In the following passage he relates the state of the gardens in the mid-17th century: “There are twelve fountains, each one of which is accompanied by four beds of flowers, herbs and differ-

ent plants, with beautiful and artful compartments and links, with so much variety of colour that whether you look upon them from the windows above or stroll along the broad paths that cross them and mark them out, they seem fine carpets laid by Spring... In the centre of each fountain, which are square, is a pine cone in granite from which the water issues with force and shoots aloft in sparkling crystal plumes. On the walls of the grilles of the vaulted basements, below, are wooden lattices, green, upon which entwine and interweave roses, jasmine, globe-flowers, orange and lemon trees, offering their flowers and fruit untroubled by the chill zephyrs and north winds from the Sierra. All the year round does this beauty last, with very little attention on the part of those who look after it; it is a great relief to the soul, it awakens the faculty of reflection and elevates the thought to contemplate the beauty of heaven, which here is everywhere portrayed."

These today sober gardens and the lower level of the orchard are linked by a set of stairways repeated six times in this wing, as can be seen on the general ground plan of the monastery, included in the First Design of the *Estampas* of Juan de Herrera. In reality they are two parallel flights which meet on a platform and then descend to the orchard beneath the so-called grottoes or arches in the great retaining wall. Seats, intermediate landings, descending vaults and other details make an extremely interesting walk through this simple construction.

The orchard, within an imposing fence with several highly interesting entrances (c.1587), in particular the so-called Bosquecillo gate on the lowest part of oriental face with clear reminiscences of Serlio, is arranged evenly in various squares, "with much variety of trees and vegetables" (F. de los Santos). Its irrigation was ensured by a formidable pond in which we have so often seen the monastery facade reflected. Its position at the highest part of the orchard guaranteed the pressure and descent of the water, while calling for the design of flights of steps with rails giving access to the walkway surrounding it, all of the

finest and original architecture, repeating the characteristic ball which so often graces the balustrades and coping of the Escorial. The pond supplied not only the orchard with water but also the monks with fish, here also following a time-honoured custom which ensured the meagre diet of the religious community.

Within the orchard grounds there is a simple but interesting Snow Well, and also an original well-built construction called the Cachicanía (Overseer's Lodge) (1596), somewhere between an orchard keeper's dwelling and a tool shed, also according to plans by Francisco de Mora. The porch and its steep slate roof characterise this unusual lodge, the architecture of which now displays its exclusively functional character.

The territory or Lonja of the monastery is defined by several buildings delimiting the monastery's public space. This space was not only one that could be crossed by corteges and privileged guests without breaking the enclosure, it was also a passing place for people travelling back and forth on this side of the Sierra, traversing the monastery complex beneath the so-called Pasadizo (Walkway) through one of its seven arches. In view of this, the idea of guaranteeing the seclusion of the Friars' Garden is made clear when Herrera closed off the Lonja on the south side with a facade which, starting from the Apothecary Tower, conceals the end of the Garden from view. This facade is in reality a support plane for the Sun Corridors, that is the Convalescents' Gallery, and for the Apothecary, all of which would appear to have been required by the increase in the number of monks, which made the infirmary quarters initially intended insufficient. This gives us to understand that what we see is an expansion of the monastery's services which to avoid breaking the rigid geometry introduced this appendage while the work was in progress. While the facade of this part is extremely sober with its closed face, the architecture of the Convalescents' Gallery with its two floors is open and cheerful. It might even be said to be one hitherto unknown in El Escorial, in view of the orchestrated colonnade which whimsically alter-

nates architrave and arch solutions, following equally individual and changing rhythms which force those of the upper Ionic colonnade. The link between the infirmary area and these Sun Corridors leaves much to be desired, from the point when the upper part is left uncovered by a projecting balcony which shows how improvised the extension was.

The architecture of the Apothecary is similarly of great simplicity, with a small inner courtyard, in which eight rooms contained "strange stills and new-fangled alembics; some metal, others glass, with which a thousand tests are made on Nature, in the natural mixtures, unravelling by dint of art and fire, its virtues and wonderful secrets" (F. de los Santos), that is, a real chemical-pharmaceutical laboratory.

The following statement of Father Sigüenza is well known: "Philip did not want either inside the monastery or by its walls beasts or working animals, only men of reason...", so that buildings like the Compañía Building (1590-1597), designed by Mora, were required. This is linked to the monastery by the Walkway mentioned above, which runs along on arches, and the Apothecary. The Compañía is built around a courtyard with its main access on the south side. Its four galleries contained a large number of very different rooms which today, used for university purposes, are barely recognisable. So it is worth recalling that in the part that faces the monastery, the east wing of the Compañía, was the inn; the south side, the infirmary for the School and Seminary children, and one for guests, servants and the poor. This same wing included a large refectory for the servants and another for pilgrims and the poor, with a shoemaking shop occupying part of the ground floor; in the west wing were the sleeping quarters of the monastery servants; and finally on the north side was a water mill, granary, flour storeroom and bakery. In the words of F. de los Santos, after "this large cloister and its formal perfections, there are other lowlier buildings, where there are also courtyards, sheds, stockyards, stables, smithies and one of the best tanneries in Spain, with many other crafts necessary in a House like this, large and

set down in a desert." This area, now dismantled, was entered by a broad monumental gate which recalls the ones in the fence around the monastery orchard.

If we do not follow Herrera's design, we would now be entering the Oficios (Palace Service) Building, the so-called First and Second ones, since the third was added with good judgement by Juan de Villanueva in the 18th century. The three buildings face the monastery from the north, offering a complementary image as civil architecture for they housed "the royal catering services and quarters for the catering staff", although they were later used as accommodation for ministers and "Principal Knights of the Chamber". The first building was by Herrera, the second by Mora and the third was erected by Villanueva for the Minister of State (1785). Austere in aspect, it has an interesting arrangement, for standing on a rise on the land it is taller on the Lonja facade than at the rear which is conceived quite differently. The main granite facades and the steep slate roofs ensure its formal and chromatic relationship with the monastery, while the rear displays a reduced height and a curious comb-shaped plan. Between its teeth are courtyards with simple porticos which recall those of the Overseer's Lodge, while the second Oficios Building incorporates a small church which stands out with its lofty belfry crowning the simple facade.

The third Oficios Building is very different. Here Villanueva, respecting the facade of the Lonja, arranged its interior around two courtyards, with a wonderful main staircase. Villanueva himself was to be responsible for definitively closing off the Lonja with the Infantes' House, so that only the well-known painting by Gabriel Joli gives us a picture of what the complex looked like before the neoclassical architect's intelligent intervention. The Infantes' House (1770-1776), designed to accommodate the staff of the Infantes Gabriel, Antonio and Francisco Javier, is another masterpiece by Villanueva in which he again respected the overall Herrerian character, so that forming a line with the Compañía Building, only those in the know are aware that it is an 18th-century work. By

contrast, in the interior, Villanueva arranged apartments around light wells, connected by long corridors with staircases at the ends: a master class in architecture in which modernity and respect for the existing elements are held in a perfect balance.

The building of El Escorial indeed had a brilliant conclusion with the arrival of Juan de Villanueva. He was responsible not only for the buildings we have just discussed and others within the *quadro*, but also for the Upper House and the Lower or Prince's House (1777), that is two villas, two small court palaces each with its gardens, for the Infante Gabriel and the Prince of Asturias, the future Charles IV. These buildings lead us away from the monastery physically and also emotionally, for then El Escorial turned from a place of silent retreat and contemplation into a Royal Seat which shared with the Court the work and leisure of the fun-loving society of the 18th century. This is the climate in which one should interpret these two architectural jewels, real whimsical fancies, which contain well-appointed and discreetly-sized rooms designed for brief sojourns enjoying the landscape, listening to music or receiving friends.

Here Juan de Villanueva left us two excellent examples of his talent in his blending of the function these buildings were to perform and an architectural image in keeping with that of the monastery. The Prince's House, somewhat further away and very close to the Lower Escorial, was built in two phases, the first between 1771-1775; the second, between 1781-1785, enlarged the initial nucleus with a rear wing and its gardens. On the main facade is a tetrastyle portico which serves to support a spacious balcony; from the lateral facades porticoed walkways lead off to two adjoining pavilions. The building serves as a compositional reference to both the front gardens, acting as their backdrop, in which the Italian gardener Luis

Lemmi intervened, and to the ones added when it was extended, on which Villanueva himself may have worked. The entrance to the garden at the rear includes a neoclassical distyle solution "in antis" at the end of which was the main axis. Fountains, boxwood hedges, flower beds, fruit trees and a large pool at the highest point, all enclosed within a wall with elegant coping, complete this corner of Escorial, often forgotten by visitors to the monastery.

The simple granite architecture of the Prince's House in no way leads one to suspect the delicacy of its interior, a real showcase of 18th-century taste in decoration: as interesting as it was ephemeral and capricious, with Baroque forms alongside a growing neoclassicism. The small size of its rooms and their low ceilings, with the exception of the lobby, make for an intimist interior in which whimsical rooms of porcelains, embroidery, portraits and so on succeed one other. Magnificent indeed is the dining room where Empire-style furniture rubs shoulders with Baroque canvases by Luca Giordano. In another room a superb Pompeian ceiling by the Bolognese Luis Jappelli shelters an excellent collection of paintings by Corrado Giaquinto.

The Upper or Infante Gabriel's House is simpler architecturally, the distribution of its plan reminiscent of Palladian villas. It occupies a high part of La Herrería not far from the monastery and is also surrounded by gardens from which Philip's great work as well as the sweep of the landscape can be viewed—a belvedere in the real sense of the word. The interiors are simpler although they are graced with good furniture and ceilings, with work being done in the period of Alfonso XIII, all now duly restored. The most eye-catching room is the central salon with an openwork dome to let in the light, which, in lead and slate, gives the roof the graceful Baroque outline we may appreciate today.

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